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THE CONGREVES

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By the Same Author

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GENERAL SIR WALTER CONGREVE, V.C., K.C.B., M.V.O., A.D.C. GENERAL

[*Frontispiece*

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THE CONGREVES

FATHER AND SON

GENERAL SIR WALTER NORRIS CONGREVE, V.C.

BT.-MAJOR WILLIAM LA TOUCHE CONGREVE, V.C.

BY LT.-COL. L. H. THORNTON, C.M.G., D.S.O.
LATE THE RIFLE BRIGADE

AND

PAMELA FRASER

WITH A FOREWORD BY FIELD-MARSHAL
H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT, K.G., ETC.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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FIRST EDITION . . . 1930

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PREFACE

OF the Diaries so carefully kept by Sir Walter Congreve while on active service in South Africa and during the Great War, only a fragment in each case can be discovered. I have been therefore more than usually dependent upon the kindness of others for my material. To those who have lent me letters, and to those who having been intimately associated with Sir Walter Congreve in the Service and have been good enough to furnish me with appreciations of his work, I tender my most grateful thanks.

In particular I beg with much respect to express to His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught my gratitude for his great kindness in writing a Foreword, and in permitting me to make extracts from the letter of Sir Walter Congreve referred to at the end of this Memoir.

L. H. T.

RINGMER,
SUSSEX,
1930.

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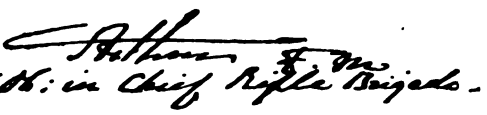
FOREWORD

IT is with great pleasure that I write this small tribute as a Foreword to the memory of one whose life is so well described in these Memoirs.

Walter Congreve served on my Staff, both in Ireland and when I was Inspector-General, and during those years I had great opportunities of getting to know him very intimately. His charming disposition made it a great pleasure to work with him. He was a man of sound common-sense, and with a high ideal of duty before everything. No officer on my Staff ever served me better, and I had great confidence in his tact and judgment. He had great knowledge of the Service, to which he was devoted. In Walter Congreve the Rifle Brigade had a devoted and distinguished officer, who was an example to every Rifleman, and I feel that all in the Regiment will mourn with me the loss of one whose name will ever be remembered with pride and affection.

This Foreword would be incomplete without reference to his gallant son Billy, who so nobly followed in the footsteps of his father. His record in the Army was unique. It is rare indeed that both son and father in the same Regiment should have won the Victoria Cross. The names of men, like those of the Congreves, have made the British Army what it is.



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INTRODUCTION

Some Personal Notes

By Celia Lady Congreve

IT is difficult, perhaps impossible, to write fairly and dispassionately about the character of a person one knows very intimately and loves very dearly. One is too close to see it in its right focus, and the very strength of one's wish, that others should recognise its beauty and worth, makes one the more anxious to be just in presenting the whole, and to see dispassionately the human failings common to us all. But I think it may truly be said of my husband that his character belonged to the ranks of those whose failings are the *défauts de ses qualités,* and are due, never to weakness, but to the excess of strength.

The ascetic strain in my husband's family will later be referred to, and I think it accounts for his great dislike of luxury of any sort. Dislike is too mild a word—he had a horror of it.

He appreciated a good house, a good horse, a good garden, good cooking, and all done "decently and in order" as much as most people, but anything beyond that —a house over-full of comforts, a garden too perfectly cared for by too many gardeners, an over-abundance of rich and expensive food and drink, made him really unhappy.

A meal in a smart restaurant was a misery to him. He could not understand men not being able to travel without a valet, heaps of luggage, "Blue" trains, and *wagons lits.*

When going abroad he would rather go by Southampton and Havre than take the rich man's route via Dover

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and Calais! We used to laugh at him about it. But he was never hard in his judgments of those who do these things; there was never anyone quicker to see the best in people, even in those most unlike himself.

There were funny contradictions in his character. In some ways he was conservative, orthodox and old-fashioned, in others original, unconventional and modern —though the last word as applied to himself would certainly have horrified him! I always thought he would have brought up a daughter wonderfully in these difficult days. She would have been so straight, and yet so brave and free.

The neatest of men in everything else, he fell away sadly in the matter of handkerchiefs. In vain was he presented with the best of silk and cambric, large and small, patterned and plain. They remained in his chest of drawers, and a sixpenny Bandana, preferably very old, was all he would use—he said it was more comfortable.

I well remember my chagrin at a large review in Palestine when he was taking the salute as C.-in-C. I was close by in a car, and as the troops were passing, I saw him produce an enormous red and yellow affair, full of such large holes that the sun shone through them, and flourish it several times before applying it to his nose.

Much has been said of the charm of his manner, which was indeed wonderful. I have seen men exactly his opposite in every way—breeding, politics, religion, ways of living and ways of thinking—completely bewitched after quite a short interview, and, if the acquaintanceship continued, deeply influenced by his opinions; but on the other hand, any sort of snobbishness, pretentiousness, or lack of sincerity made him shut up like an oyster. It did not matter who the person might be, nothing would induce him to be more than barely polite. He could not stand incivility from those from whom he felt civility to be his due, and swift was the retribution that fell upon

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the unfortunate who displeased him in this respect, for he was not patient with bad manners and had the gift of very caustic sarcasm.

Impatient as he could be at times, I have been told that his patience as Musketry Instructor with the really painstaking but stupid recruit was marvellous. "He will explain the same thing over and over again," one of the men said to me. "It doesn't matter how often, he never gets cross."

But he could be very hard on cowardice, slackness or lack of perseverance. He was entirely fearless himself; he never left off trying until he had mastered a thing, and he expected the same from others. This applies also to illness. He never gave in or spared himself until he was ill—too often, until he was very ill—and was not sympathetic to *malades imaginaires,* or people who made too much fuss over small ailments. But he was wonderfully kind, thoughtful and careful in cases of real illness or symptoms that might turn out to be dangerous.

A private soldier, who was asked by someone the reason for his great devotion to the General, replied, "Because he never sends us anywhere where he wouldn't go himself;" and if one adds, "Yes, but he also expected others to go where he went, to do what he did, to bear uncomplainingly what he bore," one has two of the dominant notes of his character, and those who failed to carry out his high ideals of courage, discipline and fortitude may have found him hard at times, though never as hard to others as he was to himself.

Even as a very young man he was unselfish. His "nun" sister wrote to me not long after he died: "His great unselfishness stands out clearly in my memory. I remember how, coming home from Oxford, he found me, as a child, with a very bad cold and father and mother away, and he sat up all night poulticing me."

He had a great love for children. It was his pity for the unhealthy, underfed little creatures we used to see in

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our walks through the slums of Valetta—for we explored them all—that led to the establishment of a group of soup kitchens for the benefit of the children belonging to the very poorest class in Malta.

Once, when giving prizes at a large school, he noticed that two boys, who took a great many, looked very white and thin; he asked the Head Master about them, and finding that they were desperately poor and frequently got no food before going to school in the morning, he paid for a good breakfast for them up to the time he died.

I did not know until then that he had been paying for extra tuition for the son of a poor farmer who lived near one of the summer palaces. He was a clever, hard-working boy, but nervous and highly strung, and not good at examinations, and my husband thought it might help to pull him through the next one, as it happily did, and the boy is now doing well in the Dockyard.

On one of our walks we saw some rather nice pen-and-ink drawings in the window of a little shop, and went in to ask the price; it was a tiny place, the shop-keeper very young and the drawings very cheap.

My husband chose the sketch—price ten shillings—of an old building in Valetta, and before paying asked, "Are you the artist?" "Yes, sir," said the boy proudly in fairly good English, "I've been an artist all my life." "All your life," said Walter, laughing; "why, how old are you?" "Twenty-one to-day," was the answer, whereupon he was handed a twenty-shilling note with the words: "There you are, ten shillings for the sketch and ten shillings for a birthday present."

The artist did not know who his customer was, but must have found out later, for at Christmas a small water-colour arrived as a present for the Governor with a charming note, thanking him for his "gentleness." He did not do these things to be "seen of men" or heard of by them.

No one cared less what people thought or said about

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him. I will quote one small instance of his indifference to public opinion.

When he was G.O.C. in Egypt, he moved G.H.Q. from Abassia to a derelict hotel in Cairo that had been used as a hospital during the War, and this change he carried through with the minimum of expense, and with the object of saving the War Office the very large sums that were being expended upon petrol for every variety of car and motor-bicycle, in which the G.H.Q. officials were making their daily journey of five or six miles into Abassia and back. One of the less responsible daily papers immediately published an article about Generals "who for their own convenience and in order to be nearer to the gaieties of Cairo put the War Office to the terrible expense of breaking up a well-established G.H.Q. and taking over an hotel in the fashionable part of the town, etc., etc." Someone at the War Office cut this out and sent it to him with the words appended: "What have you to say about this?" He wrote underneath: "Nothing, W. N. C.," and sent it back. He heard no more of it.

He never played to the gallery for one moment in all his career, but the popularity he never sought was his in full measure, though even those nearest to him, who knew what he never realised himself during his life, were amazed by the tributes of love, admiration and sorrow that poured in upon them from all over the world after his death.

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PART I

WALTER CONGREVE

By

Lieutenant-Colonel

L. H. THORNTON, C.M.G., D.S.O.

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CHAPTER I

FAMILY HISTORY

"Even the Rifle Brigade never produced a more magnificent pair of soldiers than the Congreves, father and son."—*Truth*, March 9th, 1927.

WALTER NORRIS CONGREVE was born at Chatham on November 20th, 1862. He was the eldest son of William and Fanny Emma Congreve, of Congreve Manor, Staffordshire, and Burton Hall, Cheshire. His mother was the daughter of Lee Porcher Townshend, of Wincham Hall, Cheshire.

Tradition has it that the Congreve family's association with Congreve Manor dates back to Saxon times. In this connection, when speaking of William Congreve, the dramatist, Dr. Samuel Johnson said that he was "descended of a family of so great antiquity that it claims a place among the few that extend their line beyond the Norman Conquest." Whether the family of Congreve of Congreve is of Saxon or Norman descent is however still uncertain.

The first member of the family about whom details are forthcoming is Alan, or Alanus de Congreve—born about 1200—but the pedigree is carried considerably farther back, the first names only being mentioned. In 1361 the family received a considerable augmentation of property by the marriage of Geoffrey de Congreve with the heiress of the de Stretton and Champion families.

Between this date and the Civil War no event of importance in the family history is recorded, but in the struggle between the King and Parliament the Congreve family took an active part, risking life and property freely in the Royal cause. Edward Congreve was "unfortun-

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ately slayne in Ireland at the taking of a castle with a shot in the thigh" in 1642. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Congreve held Newnham-on-Severn in Gloucestershire for the King, and was killed in Littledean House in that town by the Roundheads. Captain Christopher Congreve also served the King in Ireland, and came through unscathed.

Richard Congreve was one of the thirteen Staffordshire Squires who helped Charles II to escape from the Parliamentarians after the battle of Worcester. In reward for their services, and in memory of one of his many hiding-places, Charles promised to create a new Order, an hereditary "Knighthood of the Royal Oak,"[1] to be bestowed upon these faithful supporters. But the promise, alas! shared the fate of many another of his promises—it was no sooner made than forgotten, the only tangible proof of the Royal favour being a picture of Jane Lane by Lely, "The Gift of the King," a not very adequate return, seeing how impaired the family fortunes had become during the war.

In the period which elapsed between the Protectorate and the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession no event of any particular moment to the Congreve family is recorded, but two documents of interest have been preserved, namely, commissions issued to John Congreve signed in one case by King Charles II in 1678 and the other by King James II in 1685.

With the advent of the War of the Spanish Succession the Congreve family soon became busily engaged. Ralph and William served at Blenheim, for which action each received a gratuity of thirty pounds. William remained with the forces serving under the great Duke, and was present at Malplaquet as a Brigade-Major, while Ralph was transferred to the Army in Spain. He and Charles Congreve served at the battle of Almanza in 1707, in which action the French and Spaniards, under an English-

[1] *Life of William Congreve*, p. 2.

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CHARLES CONGREVE OF STRETTON AND CONGREVE
From the portrait at Chartley Castle

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man the Duke of Berwick, defeated an Anglo-Portuguese-Dutch Army commanded by a Frenchman, the Marquis de Ruvigny, better known under his British title of Lord Galway.[1] At Almanza Charles Congreve lost an arm, and was in 1709 awarded a pension of one hundred pounds, in that "he had lost his arm and all that he had in the world except a loving wife and children . . . in the late expedition into Spaine." His picture, now at Chartley, shows the amputated arm to have been his left, the same that Walter Congreve lost in the Great War more than two hundred years later.

Ralph having passed through the fighting at Almanza unhurt, lived to become the Governor of Gibraltar, the second to be appointed after the first siege of that great fortress.

William having survived the war appears to have developed into a sad spendthrift, and was forced to sell Stretton in Staffordshire, which had been in the family since 1361. Tradition has it that William had also arranged to sell Congreve itself, but hearing of it his sister Marianne, a lady of determination and despatch, having driven from Wales all through the night, arrived at Congreve Manor early in the morning, and when the prospective purchaser arrived shortly afterwards there was Marianne on the doorstep ready to meet him and, what was more, determined to drive him out. Having dealt successfully with the would-be buyer, Marianne turned her attention to her brother, and extracted a promise from him that the Congreve Manor estate should not be sold.

So far we have dealt only with the distinguished members of the main line of the family, and we will now

[1] Almanza has the further distinction of being a battle in which the losses were on a par with those incurred during the Great War, the 9th Foot, for instance, having all its officers except one killed or wounded, and the 6th Foot all but two.—*History of the British Army*, vol. i, p. 487.

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turn to members of junior branches who in any way became eminent.

In 1669 was born William Congreve, the famous poet, whom so great an authority as Sir Edmund Gosse regards as "our greatest comic playwright." [1]

William Congreve was never married, and he seems to have decided to remain single at an early age, for he was not twenty-three when his famous play, "The Old Bachelor," was written, in which the following lines occur:

> "What rugged ways attend the noon of life!
> Our sun declines, and with what anxious strife,
> What pain, we tug that galling load a Wife."

His vow of celibacy proved to be, if we may judge from his writings, no bar to a series of friendships of a very passionate and, it may be added, of a very temporary nature with various ladies. If there was one *chère amie* to whom he was more devoted than to another it was Henrietta, the Second Duchess of Marlborough, whose portrait, a gift from herself, still remains in the possession of the Congreve family. The poet's literary activities came to a conclusion early in life, for he seems to have written practically nothing after the age of thirty. His plays had brought him in but little money, and he would have fallen upon hard times had he not had powerful friends who obtained for him lucrative appointments, such as Licensee of Hackney Coaches, Commissioner of Wine Licences and Searcher of Customs, odd employment one would think for a literary genius.

One would have expected that his duties in regard to the importation of wine would have demanded some knowledge of the subject, but his judgment in such matters appears to have been far from good, for Swift, after dining with the poet, wrote in no grateful mood, "Congreve's nasty white wine has given me the heart-burn." It must be confessed that there was small excuse

[1] *The Life of William Congreve*, p. 169.

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for giving his guests inferior liquor, for he has recorded himself that "admirable champagne for twelve pence a quart and as good Burgundy for fifteen pence a quart" [1] could be obtained in France. These prices were paid in 1700 during Congreve's tour in Northern France and Belgium, a tour the pleasure of which was sadly marred on one occasion by having to travel "twelve leagues together, with a mad fanatic in a waggon who preached to me all the way." Seldom can a zealot have wasted his time so completely.

Congreve passed away in London on January 19th, 1729, when within a few weeks of completing his fifty-ninth year. His end was expedited by injuries received when his coach was upset in the previous autumn, a danger which all incurred in those days who exchanged the safety and fatigue of the saddle for the comfort and risk of the coach.

Journeys by coach were indeed most perilous at that time. When in 1704 the Prince Consort journeyed to Petworth from Windsor, a distance of only forty miles, he took fourteen hours to accomplish the journey, "so atrocious were the roads in that wild country." Small wonder that the ordinary person preferred to travel on horseback.

The poet's family still possess his portrait, in a very beautiful bright blue coat, by Kneller, and also a delightful picture of him as a little boy with a mischievous face and long brown hair, by one Clarea, who may have been an Irish artist. His family also retain his walking-stick and the ring given him by the Duchess of Marlborough, a ring with her hair inside, the stones being a large turquoise surrounded by diamonds.

The next member of the family to distinguish himself was Lieutenant-General Sir William Congreve, a very distinguished gunner, whose active service covered the Seven Years' War, the War of American Independence

[1] *The Life of William Congreve*, p. 127.

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and the Campaign of 1794 under the Duke of York in Flanders. He was a man of a most inventive mind, and amongst other things the introduction of the block trail for Field Artillery is due to him. He was also the designer of a special mobile carriage for the three-pounder gun, which was used with effect in the War of American Independence.[1] He commanded the Royal Military Repository, a School of Instruction in artillery exercises, and was Comptroller of the Royal Laboratory. His knowledge of his profession and the technicalities of it led to his being sent in 1779 to Plymouth, to examine the gunpowder of His Majesty's ships. On inspection he found only four serviceable barrels in the whole Fleet. This brought about the establishment of the Government Powder Factory at Waltham Abbey under his direction, and here in a few years the quality of powder was so much improved as to permit of a large reduction in the charges, many of which had down to that time been as much as one-half of the shot's weight.

It is probably to this that allusion is made in Sir William Congreve's epitaph: "He saved his country a million of money, but he died unenriched himself." [2]

He was created a Baronet in 1812, shortly before his death, which occurred in 1814.

We now pass on to William Congreve, the second Baronet, who was born in 1772. In spite of his intimate and most distinguished association with the British Army, he never held a commission in the latter, but was made a Major-General on the Hanoverian Establishment. His name is usually connected by the public with the invention of the Congreve rocket. Actually he was not the inventor, but rather the improver of a weapon, the use of which had been very familiar to those who had taken part in the wars with Hyder Ali and Tippoo Sultan in Mysore. In

[1] *History of the Royal Artillery*, by Captain Francis Duncan, vol. i, p. 307.

[2] Kane's *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery.*

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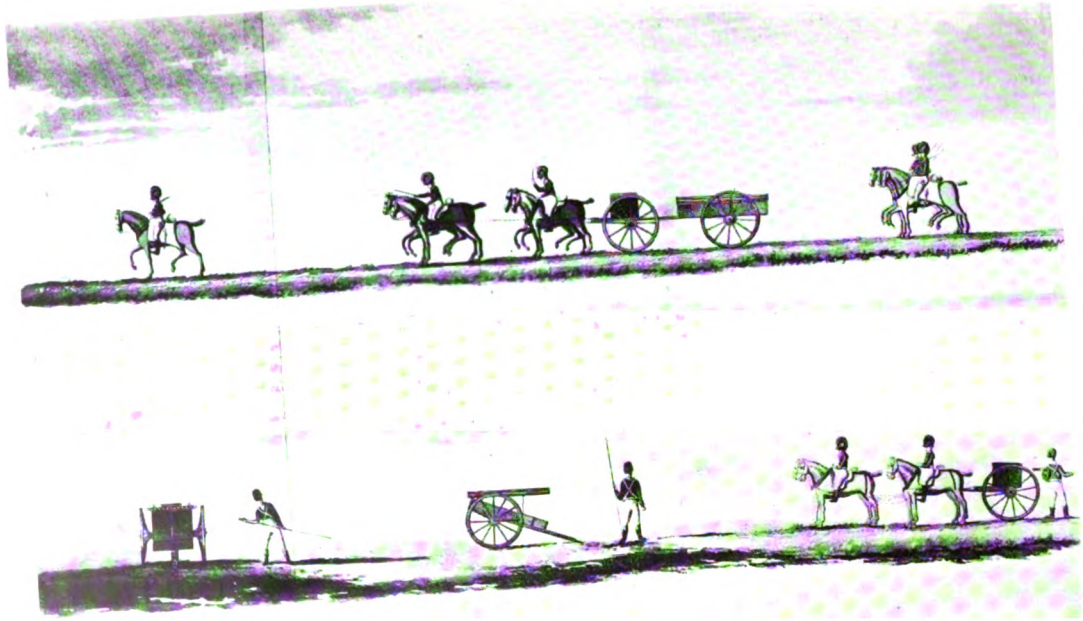

A ROCKET TROOP

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Congreve's hands the rocket became a very powerful weapon ranging up to 3,500 yards. He was present with his rockets at the attack on the French ships in Boulogne Harbour in 1805. In 1807 he was employed at the Siege of Copenhagen, and in the two following years he took part in Admiral Gambier's action at Basque Roads and in the Walcheren expedition. In 1813 he served with his Rocket Troop at Leipsig, and was awarded by the Czar for his services there the Order of St. Anne of Russia, a distinction which Walter Congreve received one hundred years afterwards.

He published in 1827 a treatise on *The Congreve Rocket System,* in which he went closely into the various uses of the new weapon. The book is plentifully illustrated, and the author had evidently gone very thoroughly into detail, not excluding drill and the transport and supply of ammunition. If the personnel of rocket units were all as well drilled as the horses shown on the accompanying plate,[1] the rocket service must have been most efficient! He was the inventor of many improvements in ordnance, both ashore and afloat, and his services were considered so valuable that he received in 1811 the high distinction of being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. In the same year he became Junior Equerry to the Prince Regent, but one would have supposed that so distinguished a scientist would have found little that was congenial in the Society which was to be found at Carlton House and Brighton Pavilion.

In 1814 he was placed in charge of the firework display which was given in London to commemorate the signing of peace: "The illuminations in the streets," says Cyrus Redding, "was (*sic*) really fine; the Park of St. James's was prettily arranged with lamps in the trees like another Vauxhall. A wooden bridge with a sort of a tower over a canal in St. James's Park was illuminated too brightly. The edifice took fire and the tower was consumed; one or

[1] *The Congreve Rocket System,* p. 63.

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two persons were killed." The casualties were clearly disappointing, hardly worth mentioning, in fact, and not to be compared with those which were sustained in Paris in 1745, when the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was celebrated. On this occasion, "there were forty killed and nearly three hundred wounded by a dispute between the French and Italians, who quarrelling for precedence in lighting the fires, both lighted at once and blew up the whole."

An explosion of a different kind occurred at the firework display held in London at the same time. The direction of the display had been placed in the hands of an Italian, the Cavaliere Servandoni, whose appointment was by no means popular. An untimely explosion sadly marred the display, for though "the rockets and whatever was thrown up into the air succeeded mighty well, the wheels, suns, etc., which were to compose the principal part, were pitiful and ill-conducted." Thinking that his enemies had spoilt his work to spite him, the Cavaliere flew into a violent rage, "drew his sword and affronted Charles Frederick, Esquire, Comptroller of the Laboratory." Whereupon the excited Italian "was disarmed, placed in arrest, and ordered to apologise in the presence of the Duke of Cumberland." On the whole the Cavaliere may be said to have got off very lightly.

Sir William Congreve took out a very large number of patents in connection with inventions outside the Army and Navy. His most useful life came to an end in 1828, his last efforts being directed to design an invalid chair for himself, which he could propel at will and if necessary turn into a bed.[1]

Of other members of the Congreve family who have served in the Army are Ensign Congreve, who was killed in action in India in 1824, and General George Congreve,

[1] Unless otherwise stated, the writer is indebted for his information about the two Sir William Congreves to the *Royal Artillery Journal* for February, 1906.

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CONGREVE MANOR

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who died in that country in 1861 while holding the post of Quartermaster-General.

Finally, there are Walter Congreve's grandfather and father, both of whom held commissions for a time, the former in the 3rd Light Dragoons and the latter in the 9th and 29th Foot, which he left to become Chief Constable of Staffordshire.

We will now turn to Walter Congreve himself and his distinguished son.

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CHAPTER II

EARLY DAYS

WALTER CONGREVE began his education at Mr. Wickham's School at Twyford, from which in due course he passed on to Harrow. On leaving Harrow he went up to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he remained for two years. He had already served for six years in the North Staffordshire Militia, and he now decided to join the Regular Army; so without completing the full University course,[1] and consequently without taking his Degree, he entered the R.M.C., Sandhurst.

In view of his somewhat inconspicuous University record Congreve was immensely amused in after years by reading in the Press an account of his own career, in which it was stated that "his 'Varsity experience gave him an academic polish that many of the very best officers at once desire and lack!"

On leaving Sandhurst in 1885 he was gazetted[2] to a Second Lieutenantcy in the Rifle Brigade. He was now twenty-three years of age, senior by about two years to his contemporaries. Officers who obtain their Commissions through the Universities to-day are not handicapped by this loss of seniority. They are not called upon to go to Sandhurst, but, having completed three years' residence at a University and taken a Degree, they pass direct into

[1] Actually, his departure from Oxford was expedited by three days for having shot a Senior Member of his College with an air-gun, not a very formidable weapon in those days. This little incident caused a certain coolness between Congreve and the authorities of his College. The hatchet was buried in after years by a most graceful action on the part of the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, as will be seen later.

[2] February 7th, 1885.

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the Army, and receive an antedate, which varies according to the class of Degree taken. Thus are they placed upon an equality with their contemporaries who have passed through Sandhurst.

Congreve was posted to the 1st Battalion of his Regiment, then stationed at Belgaum in India. After serving for a few months with this Battalion he applied to be transferred to the 4th Battalion at Meerut, for while the 1st Battalion had but lately entered upon its long tour of foreign service, the 4th Battalion was due to return home in about four years' time.

As luck would have it Congreve, by transferring to the 4th Battalion, lost the opportunity of seeing active service in Burma, to which country the 1st Battalion was ordered in 1886, operations by then having already begun. We shall have occasion to remark in the course of this narrative how on two other occasions Congreve lost opportunities for taking part in Indian Frontier Campaigns by sheer ill-fortune.

Forty-two years ago soldiering, especially in the Infantry, was a less exacting profession in days of peace than it is now. The lessons of the Franco-Prussian War had not received the attention they deserved, and the importance of maintaining in peace time Brigades and Divisions complete with Commanders, Staffs and ancillary Services had not been appreciated. Hence, the modern carefully systemised progressive instruction, beginning with that of the individual and proceeding through Platoon, Company, Battalion, Brigade and Divisional training to Army Manœuvres, was unknown. Several years, indeed, were to pass before the introduction of a system of annual Company Training, under which each Company was struck off duty and placed at the disposal of its Commander for three weeks' intensive training.

The Infantry Officer in 1885 had only four weapons to consider—the sword, the revolver, the rifle, then a

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single loader, and the bayonet. To-day he has, in addition to these four, the machine gun, Lewis gun, rifle grenade, hand grenade and gas, not to mention those anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons which the future appears to have in store. Instruction by sand models or by tactical exercises carried on out of doors without troops was in those far-off days undreamt of. Much time was given to Battalion Drill, while formations and movements suitable to wars with uncivilised enemies were frequently practised, as befitted a time when small war succeeded small war with astonishing frequency. Among other things, escalading with its wealth of detail for the ladder party was carefully taught, though to some it must have occurred that in face of breech-loading rifle fire vacancies amongst "the butt men" and "tip men" were likely to be sufficiently numerous. The same may be said about the casualties likely to be incurred by the Colour Party, whose presence in action was legislated for as late as 1896. It is true that a note of caution was sounded in the official instructions which ran as follows: "The Colours, if present, will move with the rearmost portion of the Battalion."[1] Under the circumstances the note of caution will not be considered to have been overdone!

Much attention, then as now, was given to musketry practice, in which no vanishing targets were used, while volley firing figured prominently. The annual musketry course, then as now, aroused the keenest interest amongst all ranks. The Company which could call itself the best shooting Company for the year gained great distinction. The action of any man who, through lack of keenness, was considered to have let his Company down was much resented, and such resentment would sometimes take a most active form. Still, skilled as they were in their own particular work, units of the various arms were often very ignorant how best to co-operate with other arms to the achievement of a common end, for in many an

[1] *Infantry Drill*, 1896, Section 126 (10).

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isolated station a unit might pass several years without seeing another arm of the service. Thus the Army when Congreve joined it might be said to have consisted of a number of units which were highly efficient in themselves according to the standard of that day, but there were lacking in peace time those organised Brigades and Divisions which alone could give practice to Commanders, Staffs and troops in carrying out together the work which they would be called upon to carry out together in war. The rôle of the Staff, too, was as yet very imperfectly understood, administration being a particularly weak point.[1] Many and great were the changes that Congreve was to see during his service.

In the 'eighties India was a pleasant enough country to serve in if an officer were keen on sport. Polo was a comparatively inexpensive amusement. Trained ponies good enough for an ordinary station game could be bought for Rs.400 to Rs.500, while the price for animals up to tournament form varied from Rs.500 to Rs.1000.

Officers who were capable of making their own ponies could buy a raw country-bred pony for Rs.250 to Rs.350, while a raw Arab could be bought at Bombay for about Rs.350 or so. For pig-sticking, whalers costing from Rs.1000 to Rs.1200 were used by some officers, while others rode ponies or cheaper horses costing from Rs.400 to Rs.500. Others again were satisfied with Artillery Casters, for which they would pay from Rs.80 to Rs.200. Officers who could not afford to play polo, or preferred to shoot instead, could pick up a hack to take them up to barracks or out shooting for about Rs.150.[2] Every

[1] Major A. R. Godwin-Austen's *The Staff and the Staff College*, p. 203.

[2] For these figures I am indebted to the kindness of Lieutenant-General Sir H. F. M. Wilson, who played for the 4th Battalion Rifle Brigade in the final round of the Inter-Regimental (all Arms) Tournament in 1881, 1882, 1883.

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officer possessed a pony of some sort. He who had no pony in those days would have formed a suitable subject for the pencil of a Henry Bateman. Servants' wages stood at half the figure that prevails to-day, while cartridges and sporting kit generally were far cheaper.

Walter Congreve, or Squibs, as, thanks to his rocket-famous ancestor, he came to be known to all Riflemen and to his many friends within and without the Army, was a fine rider with perfect seat and hands, and looked particularly well on a horse. He played polo regularly, but attained no marked degree of skill, though it must be remembered that the standard of play was high in the 4th Battalion, which had reached the final round of the Inter-Regimental (all Arms) Tournament in the three successive years 1881, 1882, 1883.[1]

He fished as occasion offered, and did a good deal of small-game shooting. It is probable, however, that the exercise taken, and the knowledge of natural history gained, counted more with him than the actual shooting, a trait in his character which became more marked as he grew older.

On the termination of the 4th Battalion's tour of foreign service Congreve returned with it to England. While quartered at Parkhurst he married, on June 3rd, 1890, Cecilia, daughter of the late Captain C. B. la Touche, the wedding taking place at St. Jude's Church, London.

Captain la Touche had distinguished himself during the Indian Mutiny on several occasions, and in particular at the village of Sumnassa on November 3rd, 1857. During this action he, together with Lieutenant Hebbert and four Sepoys, all of the 17th Bombay Native Infantry, "most gallantly effected the rescue of a comrade from the enemy under circumstances of peculiar difficulty, and under a galling fire." For their conspicuous bravery on

[1] The 4th Battalion was unlucky in not winning the final, a feat which was achieved by the 3rd Battalion in 1900.

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this occasion Lieutenants la Touche and Hebbert were recommended for the Victoria Cross, while the four Sepoys were recommended for the Order of Merit.

The matter in due course came up for consideration by the Secretary of State for India, who in his reply to the Governor-General of India wrote: "The native soldiers have been properly admitted to the third class of the Order of Merit.

"The soldier-like conduct of Lieutenants la Touche and Hebbert in setting an example of gallantry and humanity to the men of their Regiment is highly appreciated by Her Majesty's Government."

It is most unfortunate that the appreciation of Her Majesty's Government did not take a more material form, for had Lieutenant la Touche received the high distinction for which he was recommended, Lady Congreve would have enjoyed the unique distinction of being the daughter of one holder of the Victoria Cross, the wife of another, and the mother of a third.

Congreve was appointed Assistant Adjutant for Musketry to his Battalion, a post to which with his enthusiasm, methodical system and patience he was particularly well suited. Patience in a Musketry Instructor is important enough nowadays, but it was doubly so in the days of the Martini Henry Rifle, the recoil of which was severe. Even the most willing recruit was likely to flinch when pressing the trigger, but with willing men Congreve's patience was inexhaustible; with those whom he considered were not doing their best, his methods were very different. His work met with a speedy reward, both in the improved shooting of the Battalion generally and in the success of its Young Soldiers' teams, which won the Young Soldiers' Cup for two years in succession, 1890 and 1891. When applied to men who were naturally gifted, the success of his methods was astounding, for in his two winning Young Soldiers' teams two recruits,

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Riflemen Churcher and Wallingford,[1] were to win the Gold Medal of the British Army in their time, and were to achieve such a degree of marksmanship as to make their names household words wherever rifle enthusiasts are gathered together in any part of the British Empire.

The writer remembers hearing Congreve tell a story apropos of either his own or someone else's experiences while instructing recruits. Target practice was in progress, and for some reason or other which has slipped the writer's memory, a Section Commander had ordered a recruit to aim at his eye. The aim being pronounced correct, the Section Commander ordered the recruit to press the trigger. To this command there was no response, so the N.C.O. repeated the order. Still there came no response. At this the Section Commander said somewhat sharply: "I can't stand here wasting the whole morning over you; why don't you fire?" "She's full, Sergeant," was the staggering reply. Surely no order was ever disobeyed with a better cause.

In the early spring of 1894 Congreve, having been promoted Captain,[2] was posted to the 3rd Battalion, then in India. Early in the following year the 3rd Battalion was mobilised for service with the Chitral Relief Force, but Congreve's hopes of seeing some fighting were to be disappointed, for the Battalion was placed in the Reserve Brigade with orders to remain at Rawal Pindi in case of need, a need which never arose.

When a young officer joins his Battalion on first appointment, his recollection of men and things is likely to be very clear-cut, and the writer who joined the 3rd Battalion at Rawal Pindi during mobilisation calls Congreve to mind very distinctly indeed. He remembers

[1] Quartermaster-Sergeant Instructor Churcher won the Gold Medal (the Army Championship) on two occasions, and Sergeant-Major Wallingford won it no less than six times. Quartermaster-Sergeant Instructor Churcher's son, also in the Rifle Brigade, was Gold Medal-list in 1924, a record for father and son.

[2] December 6th, 1893.

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him as a man of the most outspoken directness of speech, should occasion demand it. In matters of principle a thing was with him either right or wrong; if wrong he said so. Withal a very kind and helpful person with a singular charm of manner. For his kindness the writer will always be grateful, for it happened that he, a very inexperienced young officer of some seven months' service, was called upon, in the absence of his Captain and brother Subaltern, to give to his non-commissioned officers the short course of instruction which preceded the annual period of Company training. The prospect was rather alarming, for though the instructor would no doubt learn much, the instructed were as likely to learn little. Being appealed to for help, Congreve lent the writer books, and gave him some very sound advice as to what he should teach. Let us hope that the non-commissioned officers benefited accordingly.

Naturally quick-tempered, Congreve kept his temper under control in circumstances which would have roused to anger even a man of a usually placid temperament. It so happened that "C" Company under Congreve was to carry out a scheme with another Company to which the writer belonged. "C" Company was to entrench and occupy a position facing north, and was to be attacked by the other Company, which was to make a wide detour round "C" Company's eastern flank, and then turning southwards to attack the entrenched position. The arrangements were verbal, and like all verbal arrangements were liable to misconception. Hardly had the attackers crossed the Battalion parade ground when the scouts signalled "enemy in sight." This surprised no one, for "C" Company had been seen clearly some twelve hundred yards away digging like moles even before the assailants had quitted barracks. Nevertheless, the Company proceeded to carry out an attack on the most up-to-date principles of fire and movement. Neither had the collection of casualties been overlooked, and the sylph-like

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form of the Company's stoutest Sergeant—and he was very stout—could be seen departing rearwards borne on a stretcher by two sweating—and dissatisfied—Riflemen. A certain air of unreality was introduced by the Colour-Sergeant, who displayed a far greater interest in the collection of empty cartridge cases than in the success of the manœuvre.

It was a little unromantic, too, to find "C" Company continuing to dig with their backs to the attack, in which it was obvious they took not the slightest interest. The assaulting Company gradually made its way forward until a point was reached suitable for launching the final assault when, according to the drill book of the day,[1] "the men will cheer, drums be beaten, bugles sounded and pipes played." Thus, in the most approved style, the position was stormed, while "C" Company, with wide grins on their faces, went on composedly with their digging. It was clear that something was wrong. Congreve then approached the Captain of the assaulting Company and, speaking more in sorrow than in anger, said: "Really, So-and-so, this is too much." He then proceeded to point out quietly but firmly that the attack had been launched from the south instead of from the north as arranged, and that the only thing to be done was to consider the operations at an end, to fill up the trenches and return to barracks. All Congreve's work that morning had been thrown away under circumstances which must have been most irritating, but he showed very slight outward sign of his annoyance.

The 3rd Battalion maintained during the cold weather of 1895–6 a quite efficient Officers' Soccer Team in which Congreve played regularly. One match against the officers of the 2nd Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers, on the latter's ground, received the compliment of a lengthy report in the Civil and Military *Gazette* under the heading of: "A Spirited and Sporting Football

[1] *Infantry Drill*, 1896, Section 126 (9).

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Match." [1] Spirited the play certainly was, for the charging which took place would have struck dumb with horror the manager of a present-day professional football team. "The game," we are told, "was fast, even, and never slackened throughout," which prepares us for the further statement that "at half-time both teams adjourned temporarily for well-earned refreshment." After the refreshment the charging became even more vigorous still, and the ground at times presented the appearance of a battlefield, which roused the spectators to a high pitch of enthusiasm, the men of both Regiments being most impartial, and seeming "as pleased when one of their own officers was grassed as they were when one of their opponents took a toss." In the end the 3rd Battalion won by two goals to one. "After a thoroughly sporting and friendly contest, in which for the winners M. Bell [2] and Captain Congreve showed to most advantage."

To these memories of Congreve at this time must be added another, that of Billy Congreve,[3] a mite of five years on a tiny pony riding with his father in the Mall at Rawal Pindi.

Early in 1896 Congreve left for England, having been posted to the Rifle Depôt, thereby missing the 1897–8 Campaign on the North-west Frontier, in which the 3rd Battalion took part.

It was not the writer's good fortune to serve again with Congreve in the Regiment, but whenever they met from time to time, whether it was in an O.T.C. Camp, or at Cambridge during the mobilisation of 1914, or on the leave boat, or in France, Congreve was always the same —he never forgot one.

Early in January 1898 Congreve left the Rifle Depôt on appointment as District Inspector of Musketry to the

[1] *Rifle Brigade Chronicle*, 1896, pp. 258-9.

[2] The late Lieutenant-Colonel M. G. E. Bell, O.B.E.

[3] The late Brevet Major William la Touche Congreve, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., Légion d'Honneur.

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Aldershot Command. To this post he was peculiarly well suited, for he had been, as has been seen, an extremely successful Musketry Instructor to a Battalion. In addition he was a first-class Regimental Officer who thoroughly understood the difficulties which faced other Regimental Officers in their efforts to train their men in musketry. Finally, he possessed in a marked degree the tact and manner which are so requisite in a Staff Officer if he is to carry out his duties without friction.

During his tenure of this appointment nothing of great moment transpired, but one little incident is worthy of record. Considerable loss had been caused to the public by the theft of nickel and lead from the stop butts. The thieves worked at night, and their capture was attended with considerable difficulty. At last, however, two or three of the offenders were brought to book. Instead, however, of prosecuting them, Congreve interviewed them and offered them regular employment in the recovery of metal from the butts. The offer was accepted, and no more trouble arose, for the official metal hunters took good care that no unofficial ones poached on their preserves.

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CHAPTER III

IN NATAL

ON the outbreak of the war in South Africa, in October 1899, Congreve at once resigned his appointment at Aldershot, and was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, which had been ordered to proceed from Crete to Natal. He sailed from Southampton on October 24th, reaching Cape Town on November 18th. He took advantage of a twenty-four hours' stay in Cape Town to visit Cecil Rhodes's house and gardens, architecture and gardening being matters which interested him immensely and about which he was very well informed. He also found time to attend a service at the Cathedral, where he records in his Diary that he heard "good music and a very florid sermon from —— who used more adjectives than I ever heard before." He should have been a good judge of sermons, for he was the most regular of regular church-goers, and, as his Diary shows, invariably attended a Service on Sundays somehow or somewhere if it was possible to do so, in war as well as in peace.

On arrival at Durban on November 23rd, Congreve heard that the 2nd Battalion of his Regiment to which he had been posted had gone up-country, and was now besieged with the rest of Sir George White's force in Ladysmith. Being at a loose end, he was attached to the Staff of the 4th Infantry Brigade commanded by Major-General the Hon. N. G. Lyttelton,[1] the other two members of the Staff being Captains H. H. Wilson [2]

[1] General the Right Hon. Sir N. G. Lyttelton, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.

[2] The late Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, G.C.B., D.S.O.

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and the Hon. H. Yarde-Buller,[1] both in the Rifle Brigade. There was plenty for an attached officer to do, and Congreve notes in his Diary that he looked after the Brigade H.Q. transport and made sketches of each outpost position as taken up.

He was thus happily employed when he received the most unwelcome information that he was to replace the Press Censor at Sir Redvers Buller's Headquarters, the officer who had held that post having gone to hospital. This relegation from the front to an appointment at Headquarters was most uncongenial, and Congreve "tried to get out of it, but no good." The office of Press Censor is not one usually associated with opportunities for distinction in the fighting-line, nonetheless this seemingly most unromantic post was to have a very great influence on Congreve's career. Having arrived at Headquarters on December 14th, Congreve, with his usual thoroughness, "got out rules for correspondents and spent the day answering their questions." The fact that the Press Censor should have been occupied in making out rules for correspondents so late in the day is a curious commentary on the importance attached to secrecy in war held then by the British Government. Five years later the Japanese were to teach an astonished world what secrecy in war really meant.

Congreve was a great letter writer, and no matter how busy, he could always make the time to write to his family and friends. He was a devoted father, and he had the art, which all devoted fathers have not, of writing letters to little people which the recipients can understand. Thus he writes to his second son, Geoffrey[2]:

"All the little boys we see up here are quite black with woolly heads. The white children are all gone away with their mothers, because the Boers came down here.

[1] The late Brigadier-General the Hon. Sir H. Yarde-Buller, K.B.E., C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O.

[2] Now Lieutenant-Commander Sir Geoffrey Congreve, Bart., R.N.

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The black people go about with no clothes on at all, or else dressed in old clothes of white men—great-coats, dressing-gowns, gaiters, hats without tops—the most extraordinary mixture; nothing is too old or too absurd for them to wear. There are more men collected here than you ever saw—men of all sorts and kinds, white, black, red and khaki colour, and I suppose from every part of the world. Besides these are horses, ponies, mules, oxen, in thousands, and the whole of us is collected in a valley about as big as Burton Estate."

In a letter to his wife he sends a message to Billy, who had ridden almost as long as he had walked:

"My pony, Billy will be comforted to hear, has put me off three times, twice the first day, once the second, real good thumps each one of them. I am master, however, now, and I think she has given it up."

In the same letter he gives his views on a question of discipline. To shave or not to shave? That is the question; a question which has recurred again and again in war, alike in the cold of a Crimean winter and the heat of a Natal summer.

"The —— have given up shaving, and look the most awful villains. I am glad to say that ourselves and the 60th have every man shaved as though he were in barracks, and the difference in appearance is most marked. I cannot see any good in encouraging the men to be dirtier than necessary. Give 'em an inch and they will take a mile. Of course, were we marching every day and all day it would be different, but here there is nothing to prevent them being clean, washed and shaved."

On the morning of December 15th Congreve was up betimes, for Sir Redvers Buller was to endeavour to force the crossing of the Tugela that day, and his Press Censor was to accompany him as Galloper.

In allotting tasks to his Artillery, Sir Redvers ordered

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the 1st Field Artillery Brigade[1] "to proceed to a point from which it can prepare the crossing for the 2nd Infantry Brigade." Orders were also given to Lieutenant Ogilvy, R.N., with his six Naval guns to follow the 1st R.F.A. Brigade, and to unlimber on the left of the Field Batteries, while two Companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers were detailed as escort. Unfortunately, Sir Redvers supplemented his written orders with some verbal instructions, which had the effect of creating uncertainty as to where exactly the Batteries should come into action.[2] Partly as the result of this uncertainty and partly owing to the bad light, the 1st Field Artillery Brigade came into action "not much more than a thousand yards" from the nearest enemy entrenchments, while the Naval guns took up their positions about four hundred yards farther back by the edge of a deep donga, where they were joined by the teams and limbers belonging to the field guns in action. In their exposed position the 1st R.F.A. Brigade was subjected to a storm of bullets and shells. The guns, however, were served with the utmost devotion, and continued so to be served until the ammunition with the Batteries was exhausted. Similarly the Infantry escort did their utmost, though unsuccessfully, to keep down the enemy's fire until their ammunition also became exhausted. The casualties in the Field Batteries had been numerous, and the gun-crews by now had been reduced to about four men per gun.[3] It was decided therefore to withdraw the gun-crews temporarily into two shallow dongas situated some fifty yards in rear of the gun position pending the arrival of reinforcements of men and ammunition. Further supplies of ammunition could only be obtained from the Ammunition Column

[1] Called No. 1 Brigade Division at that time. It consisted of the 7th, 14th and 66th Batteries, of which the 7th was detached for duty with the Mounted Brigade.

[2] *The Official History of the War in South Africa*, 1899–1902, vol. i, p. 358.

[3] *Official History*, vol. i, p. 361.

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situated three miles in rear, and efforts to open up communication with this Column had not met with any success. It was decided therefore to send two officers to Sir Redvers Buller to "report the situation and the needs of the Batteries."

The Commander-in-Chief had not been happy for some time past about the position of the exposed Batteries, and he had despatched an A.D.C. to ascertain their exact situation. This officer "having observed the guns in action from a distance through field glasses, had reported that they were 'all right and comfortable,' but under a certain amount of fire." [1] Far from being satisfied by this report, Sir Redvers set off with his Staff to make personal investigations on the spot. On the way he met the two officers despatched from the Batteries. The first, an officer of one of the Colonial Forces, temporarily attached to the Headquarters of the 1st R.F.A. Brigade, stated "that the Batteries, including the Naval guns, were all out of action, their ammunition exhausted, and every officer and man of the gun detachments killed or wounded." This was ill news, and when the second officer despatched from the Batteries arrived, and was understood by Sir Redvers to confirm the previous report—with the exception that he estimated that six rounds per gun were still left—it can easily be understood that the Commander-in-Chief was much disturbed, for out of his forty-four guns no less than eighteen were, apparently, out of action for the day.

In the face of these facts Sir Redvers "immediately decided that the Artillery left to him was insufficient, and that without guns it would be impossible to force the passage of the river." He determined therefore in the first place to endeavour to save the guns of the exposed R.F.A. Brigade and then to break off the engagement. This decision was arrived at about 8 a.m. Continuing his movement towards the 14th and 66th Batteries he

[1] *Official History*, vol. i, p. 362.

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met the G.O.C. 2nd Infantry Brigade, to whom he explained the change of plan, and instructed him to cover the extrication of the guns by moving forward two of his Battalions.

The 1st Artillery Brigade had now been out of action for over an hour, and the enemy had had time to recover his confidence, which had suffered a good deal under the very accurate fire of the guns. Hence, as Sir Redvers Buller and his entourage moved towards the front, it is not to be wondered at that so fine a target began to attract the fire of the enemy's artillery and riflemen. Captain M. E. Hughes, R.A.M.C., was killed, the Commander-in-Chief himself was hit by a shrapnel bullet, and Congreve's stick was knocked out of his hand and the horse of an officer riding beside him was killed by a shell. Under the circumstances it is surprising that the casualties were not heavier. On reaching the donga beside which the Naval guns were in action and in which the teams and limbers of the Field Artillery were sheltering, Sir Redvers ordered the Naval guns to retire. This order was carried out, though the casualties had been trifling, and Ogilvy and his men were most anxious to continue the battle.

By this time communication had been opened up between No. 1 Ammunition Column and the 1st R.F.A. Brigade, and nine waggons were on their way to the guns, but Sir Redvers Buller, not realising that the 14th and 66th Batteries were merely waiting for ammunition to enable them to resume the action, and thinking that all the gun detachments were killed or wounded, ordered the ammunition waggons not to proceed any farther.

Sir Redvers then addressed himself to the task of saving the guns, and to this end he directed that limber teams should be sent up to the gun positions and an attempt made to withdraw the guns.

In a letter Congreve gave an account of the part played by himself and others in this incident. He says

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INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH—SAVING THE GUNS AT COLENSO
From the painting at Chartley Castle

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that Sir Redvers, seeing that the drivers of the limbers needed some encouragement and leading, turned to his Staff and said, "Some of you go and help." Whereupon

"Schofield, A.D.C.,[1] Freddie Roberts, Lord Roberts's son, self and two or three others went to the waggons [2] and we three, helped by a Corporal,[3] got two waggons horsed. My pony had gone, so I got on to a troop horse and we three led the two waggons up.

"I have never seen, even at field firing, bullets fly thicker. All one could see was little tufts of dust all over the ground, and one heard a whistling noise and a phut where they hit and an unceasing rattle of musketry somewhere in front. My first bullet went through my left sleeve and just made the point of my elbow bleed; next a clod of earth caught me no end of a smack on the other arm; then my horse got one; then my right leg one; my horse another and that settled us, for he plunged and I fell off about a hundred yards short of the gun we were going to. A little nullah was close by, and into that I hobbled and sat down. It was not much shelter, however, and I had not been in it a minute before another bullet hit my toe, went into the welt, travelled up and came out at the toe-cap two inches from end of toe. It did not scratch me even, but I shifted my quarters to a better place."

Here Congreve found a number of wounded and unwounded R.A. personnel, a handful of the Devonshire Regiment and Major Babtie, R.A.M.C., who dressed his wound.[4] The letter goes on to say that "the bank of the nullah was not more than three feet high and so we had to lie down."

There for the moment we will leave him. In the meantime Captain Schofield and Corporal Nurse had got safely away with two guns, but Freddie Roberts had fallen

[1] Now Lieutenant-Colonel H. N. Schofield, V.C.

[2] Limbers are obviously intended.

[3] Corporal G. E. Nurse, 66th Battery.

[4] The late Lieutenant-General Sir William Babtie, V.C., K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

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mortally wounded. A third limber had also started from the shelter of the rear donga, but had been "reduced to a standstill" by the enemy's fire. One driver had been killed and the remaining two wounded. Lieutenants C. B. Schreiber and J. B. Grylls, both of the 66th Battery, together with Bombardier Knight and two gunners made a most valiant attempt to save the two wounded men. In this they were successful, but Schreiber was killed and Grylls severely wounded in the effort.

An hour or so later in the morning, after the enemy had had ample time to perfect, unmolested by our guns, their arrangements for preventing the rescue of the guns, a most gallant attempt was made by Captain H. L. Reed of the 7th Field Battery to recover more guns, but before the teams could reach the exposed Batteries, "Captain Reed [1] was wounded and his horse killed. Of his thirteen men, one was killed and five wounded, while twelve of their horses were shot. After this failure, Sir Redvers refused to allow any more volunteering to withdraw the guns." [2] The Commander-in-Chief therefore issued his orders for a general retirement, and the ten remaining guns were left to their fate. An order was sent to the Officer Commanding the 1st R.F.A. Brigade directing him to retire with his personnel from the dongas immediately in rear of the Battery position, but the message never reached him. The remaining drivers, limbers and teams were, however, removed in safety from the Naval donga by Captain Reed.

We will now return to Congreve, who was sheltering in the shallow donga behind the guns. His leg had by now become very stiff and painful, for the bullet had entered three inches below the knee and passing through the bone had come out at the back of the calf. Nonetheless, ever thoughtful for other people, he was very anxious to find out what had happened to the rest of his party,

[1] Now Major-General H. L. Reed, V.C., C.B., C.M.G.
[2] *Official History*, vol. i, p. 363 *et seq.*

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including Freddie Roberts, whom he had last seen "cantering alongside those limbers, laughing and talking and slapping his leg with his stick as though we were on the Mall at Peshawur again." Captain Schofield and Corporal Nurse had got away with two guns as already noted, but on looking about him, the firing having abated somewhat, Congreve could see a figure lying on the ground about twenty or thirty yards behind the left of the 66th Battery. Congreve was up in a moment, and scrambling out of the donga set off as fast as his wound would permit towards the prostrate man. As he went he called for help to enable him to bring the wounded man in, so Majors Bailward,[1] Foster [2] and Babtie at once ran out to assist. The figure turned out to be Freddie Roberts, who was brought back to the donga without further casualty.

"We lay in the donga," Congreve wrote, "from eleven to four-thirty, no water, not a breath of air, no particle of shade, and a sun which I have never felt hotter even in India; a knife could not be held in a bare hand. It was the most beastly day I ever spent, and seemed interminable, and what it must have been for the badly wounded I hardly like to think. Some of my time was passed in dressing wounds under Babtie's directions. He, by the by, was the purchaser of Greenjacket, and has him out here. My jacket was taken to shade Freddie's head, and what with blood and dirt I was a pretty object by the time I got out."

The letter goes on to describe how about 4.30 p.m. the Boers came up and overwhelmed the party in the donga in spite of a vigorous resistance by the twenty or so unwounded officers and men sheltering there. The Boers,

[1] The late Brigadier-General A. C. Bailward, R.F.A.

[2] Major W. Y. Foster, now Colonel Sir W. Y. Foster, Bart., C.B.E., incorrectly described in the *Official History* as Major W. G. Forster.

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Congreve says, treated the wounded very well, giving them water, and allowing them to be removed in one of our ambulances.[1]

Congreve was entrained with the rest of the removable wounded to the hospital at Maritzburg. There he heard that Freddie Roberts had died of his wounds. "A great loss," wrote Congreve, and it was no more than the truth, for Freddie Roberts combined a most attractive personality with very real ability and must, had he been spared, have gone far.

Congreve's recovery was a good deal impeded by sleepless nights due to asthma, a trouble of very long standing, and one that was to become worse as time went on. He had many visitors. Amongst others "Schofield came and told me how they had got two guns out safely without any of them being hit, and how splendidly the Corporal and drivers had behaved, wheeling round by the gun trails as though on parade." One most interesting visitor looked in. "Winston Churchill, just arrived from Pretoria after all sorts of adventures, came in to see me. He looks astonishingly young to have seen so much —four campaigns and stood for Parliament." One caller was not so welcome; —— came to see him, and was pronounced to be "a bad bore." His correspondence was considerable, and took up much of his time for, in addition to writing letters home, he had many to answer from friends with the Army in Natal, one writing "rot about a V.C." On several days, as he notes in his Diary, he lent a hand at dressing wounded, and on one occa-

[1] For conspicuous gallantry displayed in the attempt to carry away the guns, the following were awarded the Victoria Cross: Captain W. N. Congreve, Rifle Brigade; Captain H. L. Reed, 7th Battery R.F.A.; Captain H. N. Schofield, R.F.A.; Lieutenant the Hon. F. H. S. Roberts, King's Royal Rifle Corps (posthumous); Corporal G. E. Nurse, 66th Battery R.F.A.; and Private C. Ravenhill, Royal Scots Fusiliers. For devotion to the wounded under very heavy fire, Major W. Babtie, C.M.G., Royal Army Medical Corps, also received the Victoria Cross (*Official History*, vol. i, p. 366).

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sion went a step farther and witnessed an operation. "N——, wounded at Elaandslaagte, came in to have some bits of shell taken out of his shoulder. I watched the operation and liked it; N—— did not."

He found time for a certain amount of reading, and notes occasionally the books which he has read: *Jess,* by Rider Haggard; *School for Saints,* by John Oliver Hobbes, and *Life of John Nicholson.* The last-named must, one would suppose, have appealed to Congreve very strongly, for there was much in his own character which resembled that of the splendid Englishman who, at thirty-seven years of age, fell while leading the stormers through the streets of Delhi.

It is always of interest to know what books a man or woman reads. The books, of course, which Congreve read while in hospital are no sure guide to his tastes in reading, for he had to make the best of what he could get. Generally speaking, he cared little for novels; still he had his favourites, *The Beloved Vagabond* and *Tristram Shandy,* for instance, and this latter, together with the Bible, he always carried about with him. What he liked most were biographies, especially military ones, and poetry, to which reference will be made later.

He notes in his Diary that on Christmas Day there was "a great dinner at 12 noon, plum pudding and champagne! Doctor congratulated me on V.C., ditto a gunner, but I shall believe it when I see it. The possibility even is pleasant."

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CHAPTER IV

IN CAPE COLONY

CONGREVE left Maritzburg at the end of December and embarked on the *Rosslyn Castle* for Cape Town, which was reached on the first day of the New Year.

On disembarking he was despatched with the other sick and wounded to the Hospital at Wynberg. After a day or two at Wynberg the convalescent patients were moved to Claremont close by.

During Congreve's stay at Claremont, Lord Roberts, who had very recently arrived in Cape Town, found time, in spite of a thousand and one other preoccupations, to inspect the Convalescent Home. On Congreve being introduced to him, Lord Roberts at once asked if there was some place where he could have a talk in private. Congreve suggested going to his own bedroom, and there, seated on the bed, Lord Roberts heard at first hand the story of his son's most gallant end. As he strove during his narrative to spare his listener all avoidable pain, little can Congreve have foreseen that Fate, which had dealt so harshly with Lord Roberts, would, sixteen years later, deal no less harshly with himself.

There was, happily for Congreve, at this time living in Cape Town an uncle to whom he was much attached. This uncle was George Congreve, a Cowley Father. Hardly a day passed without uncle and nephew meeting, and Walter Congreve was introduced by his uncle to everyone who was anybody in the clerical world at the Cape at that time, from the Archbishop downwards. What he enjoyed most, however, were his walks and talks with "Uncle George." One afternoon he took a friend to hear Father Congreve read "The Skylark" and

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"The West Wind." This was a sheer delight, for his uncle read beautifully and "The West Wind" was the one of all Shelley's poems which Walter Congreve liked best. He loved good poetry, and if he had a preference it was for Browning and Shelley. But he read poetry by all and sundry and kept a book in which he put down verses, or even a few lines, which appealed to him strongly.

On nearly every Sunday he went into Cape Town to attend the Cathedral morning service, where the music was a great pleasure to him. He particularly liked good choral music in which he could join, for he had a very nice voice and was very fond of singing until his attacks of asthma became too severe.

Where father and son had as much in common as had Congreve and his eldest boy, it is curious that the latter did not share this particular taste, about which Congreve wrote to his wife: "I wish he would like music. *I* would rather do that than anything."

He was much influenced by beautiful scenery, and greatly enjoyed a visit which he made to the vineyards at Constantia, about which he wrote:

"Uncle George came up yesterday and took me for a drive to Constantia. A great big Dutch house two hundred years old surrounded by vineyards and magnificent oaks near the house, one side looking down on the sea the other up to the mountains. I think I could be quite happy there. We explored the house—big square rooms, stone paved floors and open timber roofs very high. The kitchen has not been altered since built. You never saw such a fireplace. The Burton kitchen range could walk up it bodily from bottom to top. The ironwork of the grate was over an inch thick. The cook or housekeeper, an old German woman who talked the most broken English, took great interest in me, blessed me solemnly when we left and entreated me to go home and not go back to be killed by those '—— Booren.' I narrowly escaped being kissed! She was about as dirty as old Maria Smith."

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A great pleasure was to visit with Father Congreve the gardens of Cecil Rhodes' house Grootschur, where there was a wealth of flowers. "The hedges," he wrote, "are sometimes made of flowering plants, and ixias, gladioli, agapanthus lilies, plumbago, hydrangeas, in addition to all our English flowers are everywhere."

Another great attraction at Grootschur was Cecil Rhodes' private zoo. The lions were very tame, "so much so that they will play with your walking stick and let you scratch their heads, you could go right up to the bars of the cage." The zebras, however, behaved remarkably like some human beings do on occasion. In one of the great paddocks the visitors met three zebras.

"They were very tame and friendly. One came up to me and rubbed his nose on my coat, smelt my pockets and allowed me to rub his nose and pat him. Then finding I had nothing to eat he turned round and took me one, two in the tummy before I could say 'knife.' First time he got me on soft parts, but the second on my hand and elbow and both are beautifully black to-day. I am glad to say that I got in several good ones in return with my stick. Some people behind nearly died of laughter at my misfortune till the zebra, having had a good roll in the dust, made for them and they fled screaming and I did the laughing.

Another day he went with his uncle to see a native Baptism and Confirmation:

"I went with some misgiving and I don't think it is a thing I want to attend again. The baptism lasted one hour forty minutes and the confirmation for one hour and not one single word could I understand throughout for it was all in Zulu. It was a great function all the same. About thirty were done, twenty-five men, five women. The men all appeared in blue dressing-gowns. In the floor was a tank full of water about up to the waist with steps down to the bottom. Each in turn was led to the steps by a native deacon who handed him over to the parson. He stood in another empty tank alongside

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and the native, having knelt down in the water, was ducked head under three times. He then walked out, was wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown and taken off to the vestry. From this they emerged in white trousers and jackets. Then the parson walked round, made a cross on each of their foreheads, said something in Zulu and hung a cross round their necks by a tape. The ladies did not get ducked. After, at the confirmation, the Bishop appeared in cope, mitre and crozier and performed the usual ceremony but all in Zulu. They all appeared very reverent and in earnest but I could not help wondering how much it meant to them; it is mysterious enough to us, so goodness only knows what their childish minds must make of it."

One at least of the audience had grasped the essentials of the Christian Faith for, just as Congreve was leaving the ceremony to catch a tram, he was overtaken by a half-caste man and the following conversation took place:

"'I speak to you?' 'Yes.' 'I give you sixpence.' 'But I don't want your sixpence.' 'What, you too proud for sixpence?' 'Yes, if you like to put it so.' 'But I *give* you sixpence,' producing it. 'Why do you want to give me sixpence?' 'Oh, you poor wounded man you must not walk. I give you sixpence.' I, with difficulty, escaped the sixpence, and eventually my friend left me. I hope I did not hurt his feeling, tho' I fear I may have done so. I should like to meet him again and explain, but I suppose I shall not."

While in hospital Walter Congreve had plenty of leisure for writing to his small boys:

"I am all right again," he says, "except that the muscles of the leg are very stiff. It has not been half as bad as a good go of asthma, and when it was done, did not feel worse than many a 'hack' does. It is all sorts of colours from the blood having run down inside the skin.

"When Deaves[1] saw it, he said, 'Well that is what

[1] Rifleman Deaves, who was Walter Congreve's soldier servant for many years.

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Master Billy would call a plum pudding leg,' so now you know what it looks like."

In writing to his boys he generally gave them some information about the birds, beasts and insects that he had seen.

"One day when we were on the ship lying still in the Bay, we saw some penguins fishing,—you know the penguin, don't you? He has no wings worth talking of and can't fly at all, but he dives better than any bird, and can stop under water longer.

"Well, there was a shoal of fish and two penguins, and the water was so clear that we could see it all. They each in turn went down, and kept the shoal together, just as a sheep dog does a flock of sheep,—swimming round and round, and hunting back any fish that tried to break out, and so they kept on, first one, then the other, until they had had enough dinner—it was wonderfully clever."

Again,

"Do you know the trap-door spider? There are lots of them here. He makes a hole in the ground about as big as a half-crown, and then has a lid on the top—like a button on a sofa,—which opens with a hinge. He shuts it down when he is inside and opens it when he wants to come out. He is a horrid-looking villain himself, but his house is very clever and comfortable."

On January 22nd he was appointed Adjutant of Kitchener's Horse, a corps of Irregular Cavalry which was to be raised on the same lines as those on which its sister corps, Roberts's Horse, had just been formed. To an officer who had throughout his fifteen years' service soldiered entirely with Regular troops, the experience to be gained in the raising of an Irregular corps was most valuable, for he was called upon to deal with all sorts and conditions of men: "Scallywags, stokers, stewards, farmers, cow-boys, old soldiers, gentlemen," besides men of various Cape Volunteer Corps who had

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transferred to Kitchener's Horse for the war. A very few could ride well, a few indifferently and the remainder not at all. Of the latter class Congreve wrote in astonishment: "Never saw such fellows, very willing, but absolutely ignorant. 'Don't speak to me, don't you see I am riding' sort of style." There was a great shortage of regular officers, for to start with there were only the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel N. Legge, 20th Hussars, and Congreve himself. Work was carried on at high pressure.

"We started raising the Regiment from Friday and have one Squadron completed and leaving to-morrow for Orange River, practically four days only, for we hardly had a man on Friday and could do but little on Saturday. You can imagine what it is to get a hundred men, dress them from head to toe, arm and equip them, get horses and saddlery to fit them, brand and shoe all horses, pass all the men in riding, drill them and send them off, no non-commissioned officers, no saddlers, no shoeing-smiths, all to be found where you can. We have not one single N.C.O. or man of the Regular Army except Deaves, Legge's two servants and we two."

The undertaking was a foretaste in miniature of that vast military improvisation, the greatest by far that history has any record of, which the War Office brought to a triumphant conclusion in the Great War. Those, however, who were responsible for the raising of Kitchener's Horse had one great advantage in the warm, dry weather and in the excellence of their camp at Rosebank.

"Our camp," writes Congreve, "is in a show yard, so horses can't get loose, and as there are lots of sheds and offices it makes an ideal place for the purpose we put it to, electric light and water everywhere and room for three hundred horses and men. It is pretty withal, trees all round and the mountain close by."

Moreover, great as the difficulties were, there was another immense advantage, in that equipment did exist.

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Very different were the adverse circumstances with which Commanding Officers had to battle at home in those muddy swamps which passed for camping grounds in the winter of 1914/15. The writer well remembers a so-called Progress Report submitted by the C.R.A. of a New Army Division who was struggling to produce something out of nothing in the absence of all factors calculated to promote progress and the presence of every factor calculated to retard it. "In view of the fact," wrote the C.R.A., "that we have neither guns, instruments, harness, horses, uniform, arms, nor equipment of any sort, progress may be said to be as rapid as can be expected. On favourable days I take the men down to the sea to bathe." As the date was mid-November, and as the weather was abnormally cold and wet even for mid-November, "the favourable days" were not so numerous, it is to be feared, as to enable the C.R.A. thus to fill up much of his men's time!

In one respect, at any rate, the miniature improvisation of 1900 resembled the gigantic improvisation of the Great War, in that nothing could exceed the enthusiasm, keenness to learn and good conduct of the men.

As the work reached its close very valuable assistance arrived in the shape of four Squadron Leaders from the Indian Cavalry, and Congreve, the Regiment now being complete, was able to write with very pardonable pride: "We consist of forty-two officers and six hundred men and the whole thing, men, horses, and equipment has come into existence in fifteen days, and Legge and I have done it entirely."

Busy, however, as he was, he still found time to run into Cape Town and say good-bye to his uncle's friends, the entry in his Diary for January 24th being: "In afternoon called with Uncle George on Bishop Gibson and the Archbishop. Had tea with the latter and met Mrs. Bishop of Natal." The entry concludes, as well it might, with the remark: "Very clerical day."

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CHAPTER V

IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE

ON February 9th orders were received to be ready to entrain for the Front on the 11th, for which date the Diary entry runs:

"Up at six, Celebration in Oratory, Uncle G. celebrated. Breakfast, good-bye, and back to camp. Started at 2 p.m., great trouble at the station owing to insufficient accommodation. All in by 5.30, however. After I had seen all in I went to the Staff Office to get my belts and returned to find the train going out!"

This was a somewhat unfortunate predicament for an Adjutant to find himself in! However, with a good deal of trouble a warrant was obtained to travel by the mail, which enabled Congreve to catch up his troop train at 6 a.m. the following morning.

With the Commanding Officer and Adjutant there went one Squadron only, for the remaining five had been despatched to Enslin as soon as their equipment had been completed. There it was hoped that time would be given for training. There was much indeed to be taught; very few—either officers or men—had the faintest idea of how to look after themselves on active service, much less of how to look after their horses. Very many men had never seen a magazine rifle before enlistment; indeed, in one whole Squadron there was not a single man who had done so, and there had been no time for instruction since. Of Cavalry drill, of mounted and dismounted action, of outposts and protective duties generally, the ignorance of all was complete. Yet the material was excellent, and where such a cheerful, willing spirit prevailed much could be learnt in a comparatively short time, but

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time there must be. Judge then the feelings of Legge and Congreve when, on arriving at Enslin on February 14th, they found the vast camp deserted, and were told that the army under Lord Roberts [1] had advanced, and that with the army had gone the five Squadrons of Kitchener's Horse, to be thrust all unprepared into the furnace of war.

Further enquiries, however, elicited the information that it was believed that two Squadrons were at that moment escorting a large convoy in its passage of Waterval Drift, some twenty miles away, in the Orange Free State. In the hope of regaining the command of at least two more of his Squadrons Legge applied for permission to ride on to Waterval Drift, leaving his Headquarters and the Squadron which came with it to follow later. Permission having been obtained, Legge and his Adjutant, with four Argentines, excellent men, as escort, set off about 6 p.m. with nothing but what they could carry on their saddles. Hardly had they started when a dense dust storm set in, which left them looking as if a bucket of cocoa had been thrown over each of them as Congreve described it.

"We rode all night," he wrote, "following a field telegraph line, and very jumpy it was, for we were bang in the middle of the enemy's country with no one guarding the line. It rained and thundered all the way, but we got nothing worse than a wetting, and reached camp about 2 a.m. to find a great convoy just leaving. We bedded down on an island in the Reit River just as we were, and slept like logs till 5 a.m."

One Squadron only of Kitchener's Horse was found in the camp, and this with one Company Gordon High-

[1] Many and grave were the problems which faced Lord Roberts at this time. Nonetheless, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was able to write: "The C.-in-C. sent for me. I found him more charming than ever, and apparently without a care in the world. (He was then 68.)" (*Memories of Forty-eight Years' Service*, p. 146.)

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landers and about two hundred Mounted Infantry, formed the escort for the convoy of some two hundred waggons carrying an immense amount of supplies.

A scanty breakfast of bully beef and muddy river water having been finished, Legge and Congreve were contemplating a bathe which was badly needed, for they had had no opportunity of washing since leaving Cape Town four days before, but at this moment bullets began to splash into the river unpleasantly close by. So the much needed bath had to be postponed and the rest of the day was spent returning the fire of an invisible enemy who was evidently in very superior numbers. During the day reinforcements arrived on both sides, but the Dutch, under De Wet, still retained the upper hand, and with their artillery they had smashed or set fire to a lot of waggons and stampeded a large proportion of the oxen. During the night Lord Roberts decided that sooner than cause a delay in carrying out his scheme of operations, it would be better to sacrifice the convoy.[1] Orders to this effect were sent to the Officer in Command at Waterval Drift, but Legge was not informed. At five o'clock on the morning of the 16th one of the Argentines roused Legge in a great hurry to say "they are all gone," and true it was, for in the darkness the whole escort had marched away, taking with them both the Squadron of Kitchener's Horse which had originally formed part of the escort and the other Squadron which had arrived from Enslin during the fighting on the previous day. There was not a moment to be lost.

"We saddled up jolly quick, I can tell you," wrote Congreve, "and as we got on to our horses we saw

[1] Many of the mule carts were saved with their teams, but to the Boers were abandoned 176 waggons containing approximately 70,200 rations of preserved meat, 180,000 rations of bread stuff and groceries, 38,792 grain rations and 8 waggon-loads of medicinal comforts. The teams of the ox waggons and some 500 slaughter cattle were also lost (*Official History*, vol. ii, p. 78).

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twenty Boers or so galloping down to the laager waggons about four hundred yards off. We galloped along the bed of the river and were saluted by about fifty bullets. Luckily none of us were hit, and though they followed us for a mile or so, we got safely away and overtook our rear-guard as they were getting into camp. We said nothing of how we had escaped Pretoria,[1] but the story had leaked out somehow, and there was a good deal of chaff at our expense."

In the camp was the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, who very hospitably gave Legge and Congreve and their four Argentines a breakfast which was very welcome, for they had had no food that day and nothing but bully beef and dirty water since leaving Enslin. After breakfast Congreve got his long overdue bath in the river, apropos of which he wrote: "Bathed in the river, mud up to waist, so swam up to some rocks and found myself in the drinking water, much to the indignation of a lot of men, whose anger was decidedly comic, for in spite of their concern lest Congreve should contaminate their drinking water, they themselves were washing clothes just above it!"

At the end of an uneventful march on February 17th they arrived at Jacobsdal, where they found Lord Roberts and his Staff. The Diary entry for this day closed with: "Very hot, nothing but dirt and half rations and no one to cook for us." On the following day no move was made. Exciting news was to hand, for it was known that Cronje had been penned down to his laager on the Modder River at Paardeberg, and that heavy firing had been in progress all day. Lord Roberts was very unfortunately detained at Jacobsdal through indisposition, but he marched at 4 a.m. on the next morning, February 19th, and, escorted by the two Squadrons of Kitchener's Horse, arrived at Paardeberg, twenty-six miles distant,

[1] The cage for British prisoners was at Pretoria.

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about 4 p.m. Congreve's account of what occurred is as follows:

"When we arrived we found Kitchener and Staff sitting on a hill looking at the Boer position, which was about two and a half miles off. About 5 p.m. it was announced that Cronje had surrendered and there was great cheering.[1] Lord Roberts went off to telegraph to home, and Kitchener off to the laager to receive Cronje's sword or, I suppose, his Mauser rifle. We sat close by and waited for them to come back. Presently an officer of R.E. arrived with a letter, which he read out to Bobs, and I was close enough to hear it. 'My Lord, You evidently mistook the meaning of my letter. I had no intention of surrendering. Since you are inhuman enough to refuse my request for a twenty-four hours' armistice (the villain only wanted to entrench himself and give reinforcements time to come up) I shall die sooner than surrender, so bombard away as much as you like. (Signed) CRONJE,[2] *Commandant-General.*' 'That's all right,' says Bobs, and the bombardment commenced at once with a vengeance."

It now lay with Lord Roberts to decide how he would deal with Cronje's force. On the day before, in the absence of the Commander-in-Chief, an ill-co-ordinated attempt had been made to rush the Boer position out of hand. So stout an adversary, fighting as he was with his back to the wall, deserved less cavalier treatment, and the assailants lost heavily without securing any compensating advantage. Such methods did not appeal to Lord

[1] Cronje had asked for an Armistice on the plea that he had so many dead to bury. Lord Roberts refused the request, and demanded an unconditional surrender. A mistake in translating Cronje's reply to Lord Roberts's letter gave rise to the impression that the Boer leader was about to surrender.

[2] The actual words used in the letter were: "It appears as if you entirely misunderstood my reply. I said, if you are so uncharitable as to refuse me a truce as requested, then you may do as you please. I shall not surrender alive. Therefore bombard as you please" (*Official History*, p. 148).

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Roberts, who decided to maintain a ceaseless bombardment [1] during the day, while the hours of darkness were to be devoted to a steady approach by sapping. Concurrently steps would be taken to deal with all attempts on the part of the Boers to bring up forces for the relief of Cronje. The touch of the master-hand was felt once more—to the relief of all concerned.

Kitchener's Horse took no part in the operations that ensued round Paardeberg, for the Regiment was completely disorganised by its experiences in the field. It had, indeed, been "very badly treated" as Congreve wrote. Five of its Squadrons had been thrown into the fray without any transport, and with only such supplies and clothes as they could carry on their saddles. One of the five, as has been noticed, had taken part in the fighting at Waterval Drift, where the casualties had been very slight. Two Squadrons had taken part in the operations leading to the Relief of Kimberley. Of these two, one had been dropped on February 13th to guard an important well at Blaauwboschpan Farm, with instructions to remain there until relieved by the Infantry of the 7th Division, which was expected to follow next day.[2] The plan, however, was changed, no relief arrived and the whole Squadron was captured three days later by De Wet.[3] The remaining Squadron eventually returned to Headquarters near Paardeberg with men and horses worn to a shadow.

Two Squadrons took part in the operations leading to the surrounding of Cronje at Paardeberg. On

[1] What would have passed for heavy firing in the Boer War would have been thought lightly of fourteen years later.

In the whole course of the South African War (two years and nine months) there were fired 273,000 rounds of artillery ammunition by the British Army, the amount fired by the Boers being vastly less. At the crossing of the Hindenburg Line, the British Artillery fired in one single day 943,837 rounds, weighing 40,000 tons.

[2] *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 25.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 79; *Three Years' War*, by C. R. De Wet, pp. 49–50.

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February 18th these two Squadrons were detailed to hold Kitchener's Kopje and Osfontein Farm. "Both detachments appear to have regarded their share in the day's operations as practically over, and to have neglected the ordinary measures of security." [1] They were accordingly surprised and routed by the ubiquitous De Wet, with the loss of six officers, fifty-four other ranks and many horses, including those of one Squadron complete.

Time was required to rest the personnel and the horses, and to replace the very considerable amount of equipment that had been lost. The supply conditions, however, were not favourable to rapid recuperation of either man or horse. The men were on half rations and the horses on something far less. In writing to his wife Congreve said:

"Our ration per horse was three handfuls of grain a day, and nothing else but what they could pick up, and as there were a good many thousands at the same thing, there was very little to pick. You never saw such a sight as the Cavalry and Artillery horses are. No one could recognise them as the same beasts we lately saw at Aldershot, it is quite the most miserable part of the campaign."

To a man who was as fond of horses as Congreve, the sufferings of the poor creatures must have been most distressing.

The story of the misadventures of Kitchener's Horse in the early days of their existence is of great interest, for it shows how futile it is to take into the field such raw troops. Apart from the inhumanity of such action the procedure is most wasteful in men, horses and equipment. Losses in war must be expected, but the enemy should be made to pay heavily for his successes, and this, in this particular instance, was far from being the case, as the enemy suffered not at all.

[1] *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 136; *Three Years' War*, by C. R. De Wet, p. 56.

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Out of evil, however, may come good. Lord Kitchener had taken a keen personal interest in the raising of the Regiment which bore his name. He had paid several visits to Rosebank Camp, and had watched more than one Squadron entraining there for the Front. The subsequent career of Kitchener's Horse must have been well-known to him, and it may well be that the recollection of their all too premature employment in the field may have been one of the reasons for the unbending opposition with which in 1915 he invariably met all proposals to use the Divisions of the New Armies until in his opinion no stone had been left unturned to fit them for the coming struggle.

Congreve gave a very interesting description of the general conditions prevailing in the British Army at Paardeberg.

"Things seem to be going well, I mean strategically. As far as weather goes it gets worse, for each afternoon about 4 p.m. we get a deluge of rain which makes the whole camp a bog and soaks everyone. No one has tents, not even the Generals, and you see General Marshal and suchlike sheltering under a bush or waggon. Those who are lucky get under waggon covers and make a sort of tent with them. Those who are not do the best they can under waterproof sheets or blankets. It is pigging it with a vengeance, but I am glad to hear from people who have soldiered in all sorts of campaigns that they have never met such discomfort or so hard times as these. It is satisfactory to know that one does not often get worse done and that it agrees with me, for I never was better. There was a hard fight here on the 18th, and we lost heavily. It is a very different thing being wounded here to being wounded in Natal. Here they lie about under trees and on the floor of bell tents, and then have forty miles in a waggon at two miles an hour, waggons without springs too. Fortune has been very kind to me, as I did all my troubles in luxury.

"We are camped here on the banks of the Modder River, which supplies us with water. It is getting highly

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flavoured by dead Dutchmen, horses and oxen from up above.

"The Infantry here are in a very bad way. Little food, no shelter, long marches and no water except to drink. You would not believe officers could look so dirty. Pictures of the Crimea are quite realised. The sun splits their skins, the dust gets into the splits, they're unshaved, unwashed and their clothes filthy, but cheerful withal."

The investment of Cronje lasted till February 27th, when the Boer Commander, realising that all attempts from outside to relieve him had failed, surrendered unconditionally after a most gallant defence. On the following day Congreve paid a visit to the Boer laager.

"On the 28th," he says, "I went over to see the Boer laager, and very interesting it was. I have written a description of it from a narrative I got by questions from one of our men who was a prisoner with them all the week and from my own observation. I had meant to send it to *The Times*, but Bennet Burghleigh, the *Daily Telegraph* Correspondent, got it out of me for one bottle of whisky and four pots of jam. He, though, has the letter, and I have not got the jam and whisky. The laager was something after the enclosed sketch. When I saw it most of the waggons had been looted. So all I got was a Psalm book, a small shell, a kettle and a stool, the last two very useful. The waggons were many of them ashes. The whole area was a litter of bedclothes, old coats, boots, hats, books and rubbish of every description. The people seem to have brought most of their goods with them and a very poor lot they were. The prisoners were a fine-looking lot of men."

After the surrender of Cronje, Kitchener's Horse were moved from the river to the neighbourhood of Osfontein Farm. During the last few days of their encampment by the Modder, the river had been in heavy flood, and their water supply which came entirely from the river had become more and more polluted. The move to Osfontein

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was therefore most welcome, "For," as Congreve wrote, "the river positively stank. Twenty-one dead horses and three bullocks were lying on the rocks close to our camp, and several hundreds must have gone down in the few days of flood."

Pleasant as was the change to new surroundings, the shortage in equipment and supplies remained as acute as ever.

"We are," wrote Congreve in his Diary, "very ill-provided with everything. Many men without coats, none with more than they stand up in, a good many clothes in rags and boots ditto. . . . Auction in camp of some things sent up to men who are missing: 80 cigarettes sold for £6 5*s.*, a tin of cocoa for 11*s.*, 10*s.* 6*d.* worth of Pinhead cigarettes fetched £36 5*s.* It is almost incredible, but I filed the papers and know it is a fact."

Congreve's fortunes were about to change, and he was to gain a further experience which could not but be of the greatest value to him. His Diary entries for March 3rd and 4th run:

"*March 3rd.*—Rode over to Osfontein Farm to see Lord Roberts. He was much interested in Hossock's [1] account of the Boer laager which I had taken down. Gave me a letter from Miss Roberts, a very pretty one, thanking me for my help to Freddy at Colenso. He asked me if he could do anything for me, and when I told him I should much like a Staff appointment, said he could make me a Brigade Major [2] at once, and that I could have till morning to decide. Legge very kind about it, and said I could go.

"*March 4th.*—Saw Lord Roberts, who posted me to 18th Infantry Brigade, consisting of Yorkshire Regi-

[1] Hossock was a trooper in Lord Kitchener's Horse, and was a prisoner in Cronje's laager throughout its investment.

[2] The supply of trained Staff Officers had long since been exhausted (*The Staff and the Staff College*, pp. 235–6).

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ment, Essex Regiment, Welch Regiment, Warwickshire [1] Regiment. Called on my General, Stephenson,[2] and found him living in great discomfort and on rations entirely."

The 13th and 18th Infantry Brigades composed the Infantry of the 6th Division commanded by Lieutenant-General T. Kelly-Kenny.[3] This Division, like all the other Divisions, had been improvised on the outbreak of war, for no higher organisations than Cavalry and Infantry Brigades [4] existed then in the United Kingdom in peace time. When the Army was reorganised as a result of the experience gained in South Africa, the 18th Infantry Brigade again became part of the new 6th Division, and both Brigade and Division were in turn commanded by Walter Congreve in the Great War, a very curious coincidence.

Congreve wrote at once to tell his wife of his new appointment: "I took up the work to-day. We have just got orders to march at 3 a.m. to-morrow, and I have a thousand orders to get out, so good-bye. I am absurdly well, and if I can only do well on this job I shall find myself getting on some day."

To an officer who had not been through the Staff College and whose only experience of Staff work had been the discharge of the purely routine duties of a District Inspector of Musketry, the assumption of the very important post of Brigade-Major to an Infantry Brigade on the eve of an advance—with a general action in the immediate prospect—must have been a very considerable undertaking. It is true that the movement of

[1] The 1st Battalion in each case, with the exception of the Warwickshire Regiment, which was the 2nd Battalion. This unit was at the moment on the lines of communication, and did not join the 18th Infantry Brigade till March 17th at Bloemfontein.

[2] Major-General T. E. Stephenson, C.B.

[3] The late General Sir T. Kelly-Kenny, K.C.B.

[4] These organised Brigades existed at Aldershot only. They did not exist elsewhere.

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troops in and out of their bivouacs on the open veld which was passable nearly everywhere was a far easier proposition than moving troops in and out of billets in France and Belgium during a war of movement, often in the dark, through narrow streets and lanes crowded with refugees and their transport. Still, the difficulties to be surmounted by a Brigade-Major in South Africa were sufficiently onerous, and an officer new to the work might well make a slip. "My job," he wrote, "gives me plenty to do, and is more anxious than Adjutant's. Times of starting and so on have to be arranged, and if one makes a mistake there is no disguising it. A Brigade is too big a unit to hide!" No doubt he soon realised, as did many another Regimental Officer, who during the Great War was attached as a learner to some Staff, that arrangements that worked so smoothly in the hands of a trained Staff Officer were not really so simple a matter as they appeared to be.

Few extemporised Staff Officers, however, can have picked up their work so quickly, and with practice he became "a first-rate Brigade-Major." From the first "he was very quick at grasping what his G.O.C. required to be done," and he drafted the necessary orders with a rapidity which was very remarkable.

Holding strong views as to the relations which should exist between the Staff and the troops, he was at great pains to maintain the personal touch which means so much. "Never a day passed during the long trek from Paardeberg to Komatipoort without his spending some part of it riding or chatting with some of the Regimental Officers and men." This trait in his character, combined with a never-failing cheerfulness and great charm of manner, made him "much loved by all in the Brigade." [1]

Lord Roberts resumed his advance on Bloemfontein

[1] For these particulars I am indebted to the kindness of an officer who served on the Staff of the 18th Infantry Brigade during the time that Congreve was Brigade-Major to it.

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on March 7th. Facing him on the Poplar Grove position was a force of some fourteen thousand Boers with some twenty guns, one of the largest Boer forces that was met with in one position during the whole war. There were also present the Presidents of the Orange Free State and of the Transvaal, who used all their influence to make their Burghers offer a determined resistance. The British Commander-in-Chief's intention was to move his Cavalry and Mounted Infantry round the enemy's left flank, and to place them astride of the Boers' line of retreat before the advance of the attacking Infantry was begun. Unfortunately the horses, under-fed and over-worked, were unable to move at the speed required, and the enemy on their part, reminiscent of the fate of Cronje, refusing to pay any heed to the appeals of Presidents Krüger and Steyn, streamed away from the position before our Cavalry and M.I. could carry out their part of the programme.

The British Infantry had a long and weary tramp under a hot sun without the excitement of an action.

"We were walking," writes Congreve, "from 3.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. and the men were fairly done, for they had half rations only, very little water and no recognised halts. When we got in we had no transport, and so no food and no coats or blankets, and of course it was a cold night. My groom, whom I brought with me from Kitchener's Horse, found some maize and produced some porridge, or we[1] should have come near starving, for all we had had the whole day was two biscuits and a small tin of sardines between three of us. I never appreciated anything more than that porridge."

To troops who were suffering such hardships due to shortage of supplies, it was most annoying to find how well their opponents were provided for.

[1] The Brigadier, the Brigade-Major and the A.D.C., Lieutenant G. W. Howard, the Essex Regiment, now Colonel G. W. Howard, C.M.G., D.S.O.

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"The Boers," Congreve notes in the same letter, "seem to live a good deal better than we do; their officers have tents, their men shelters, and there is in all their laagers abundant signs of meat, flour, and vegetables and ammunition. They evidently fled in a hurry, for they had left behind or burnt nearly everything."

The result of the Poplar Grove operations was most disappointing, for had the condition of the horses enabled our mounted troops to carry out their orders, so severe a blow would have been dealt to the Boers as might have appreciably shortened the duration of the war.

A short advance of eight miles on the following day was followed by a halt on March 9th to rest the unfortunate transport animals. On the next day the advance was continued at 6 a.m., the objective being Barberspan, twenty-one miles ahead. After fifteen miles had been covered, the hour being 2 p.m., "it was reported," as Congreve notes in his Diary, that "the enemy was in force in front (about Dreifontein)."

Whilst watching the opening stages of the action which was to follow, Congreve, his Brigadier and one or two other officers were collected in a little group discussing the situation. Congreve was riding "Cronje," a Boer pony which he had lately acquired, and to which he was to become much attached. At the moment he was sitting not astride, but side-saddle, a safe enough procedure on most occasions, for "Cronje" was a confidential animal and one that nothing usually upset. In the midst of the conversation one of the very few "Long Tom" shells that were fired that day fell somewhat unpleasantly close. This was more than "Cronje" could put up with, and he made a violent plunge, with the result that his master went head over heels and sat down with considerable violence on the veld, his long and rather thin legs, wrapped in the blue puttees which he generally wore at

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that time, sticking up in the air, an absurd prelude to the drama which was about to open.[1]

"Our Brigade," wrote Congreve, "was engaged till dusk and lost heavily in storming a succession of low kopjes which the Boers held most stubbornly. In spite of heavy shell fire, they remained firing until our men got within thirty yards of them." In this action the 6th Division and more particularly the 18th Infantry Brigade bore the full brunt of the fighting. The casualties, viewed according to the standard of those days, were heavy, the Welch Regiment losing 17.5 per cent. of its strength, the Buffs 15 per cent. and the Essex 11.25 per cent.[2]

"Our opponents," continued Congreve in his Diary, "turned out to be the Pretoria Commando, with the Z.A.R.P. amongst them, all picked men." [3]

Congreve himself had a particularly hard day. The transport with its worn-out animals failed to come up, and he notes in his Diary:

"No food and no water except a little very muddy I got from a hole in the afternoon. We bivouacked for the night where we were, amongst dead soldiers, Boers, horses and a horrible quantity of wounded. I had a beastly night, for I had to go round looking for ambulances and putting out outposts in the dark, and did not finish till midnight. It was a very cold night, and the wounded must have had a bad time, for many of them had to stop where they fell amongst the rocks. We marched next morning at 6 a.m., so I was up at four [4] arranging the start."

He had slaved in order to get in as many wounded as possible, and had sacrificed his own much-needed rest in

[1] See note to p. 52 ante. [2] *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 228.

[3] A highly efficient police force, whose gallantry on this day could not have been exceeded, as Congreve recorded in another letter.

[4] Congreve prided himself on being able to wake up at the exact time that he wished. He therefore dispensed with the usual aids to waking, and his confidence was never misplaced while with the 18th Infantry Brigade.

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consequence. There was, however, another and a very different side to his character, for should he happen to notice any man who, in action, was failing to support his comrades, then Congreve could be most drastic, as hard as flint in fact; even Robert Crauford or Sir Charles Napier, whom he was fond of quoting, could not have been more ruthless than he. In a letter to his wife he writes:

"Our men behaved very well indeed on the 10th, but there was some skulking, men lying behind ant-hills and rocks, and falling out with imaginary ailments and to help the wounded. I drove out a good many, and one I was pleased to see got killed shortly after."

The narrow escape of Presidents Krüger and Steyn and the Burgher Army at Poplar Grove and the heavy losses incurred by them at Dreifontein had forced the Boers to reconsider their position. They decided in future to employ small columns only, and those of a most mobile description. By attacks on the invaders' lines of communication and by one rear-guard action after another they hoped to prolong the war until such time as one of the Great Powers should take advantage of Great Britain's entanglement in South Africa to intervene on their behalf.

Congreve very quickly came to appreciate his Brigadier.

"My General," he wrote, "is very sound, never fusses and lets me do pretty much as I like in all small arrangements, and is always ready to take all responsibility, and the Commanding Officers like him. We three[1] get on excellently, and seem much of a mind about most things, which is lucky as we have to live together under a cart cover ten feet by six feet!"

During the rest of the march to Bloemfontein the enemy offered no opposition, and the conversation of

[1] Brigadier, Brigade-Major and A.D.C.

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the Staff of the 18th Infantry Brigade was principally about food, and what an excellent dinner they would order as soon as they got the chance; small wonder too, for they had been on half rations for a month, and "half rations," as Congreve wrote, "means uncommon little."

On March 13th Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein at the head of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, and later in the day the Guards Brigade marched in having, in spite of the intense heat, half rations and scant water supply, covered forty miles in twenty-six hours.[1]

On the following day the 6th Division with the 18th Infantry Brigade leading marched into the capital. The troops presented a quaint enough appearance. Unwashed, unshaved, with beards of varying lengths and their clothes in tatters, many showed an expanse of bare knee in front and a considerably greater expanse of grey flannel shirt behind.

A beard does not suit everybody, and writing home of an officer well-known to his wife and himself, Congreve says: "Such a ruffian he looks with a beard."

Four days later his Diary entry shows that the days of half rations were over, at any rate for the moment. "Great feeding going on everywhere. I did not know how good bread could be till I met it again after a month." A dinner at the Club produced the following comment: "Very pleasant it was to sit on a chair at a table and have clean things to eat off—a bottle of German beer too was exceedingly good."

On the first Sunday after the arrival of the army at Bloemfontein, Congreve wrote in his Diary:

"Walked into service at Cathedral. A large plain building, but service well done and fair choir. Church

[1] *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 238. Some remarkable marching was done about this time, for early in April two detachments of the Royal Irish Rifles covered in the one case seventy-three miles in fifty-two hours and in the other forty-five miles in thirty-six hours (*ibid.*, p. 313).

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packed with officers and men, the whole place looked khaki. Sermon by Lord Roberts's Chaplain, a very good one on Christian diplomacy or tact. Christ's dealing with Zacchæus being the model. He ended by pointing out how we should try to deal with the inhabitants so as to remove the soreness of defeat and make friends of them."

On March 19th the Commander-in-Chief inspected the 18th Infantry Brigade and addressed them afterwards. Lord Roberts possessed in a very marked degree the happy knack of saying the right thing at the right time to the right man, a gift which saved him from those little *contretemps* which sometimes spoil the efforts of other Inspecting Officers in the same direction. The writer calls to mind a story which he was told in connection with the inspection of a draft that was about to leave home for South Africa a little later on in the war. There were amongst the draft a few men who had been invalided home on account of wounds or sickness, and who were now considered sufficiently recovered to go back to the front. As the Inspecting Officer reached each of the returning warriors he would say a few words, and a brief conversation would follow, such as: "What happened to you?" "I was wounded, sir." "Indeed, where was that?" "At Magersfontein, sir." "All right again?" "Yes, sir." "Glad to be going back again?" "Yes, sir," and so on. Finally, he came to a somewhat seedy looking individual, a north-countryman. "Well, what happened to you?" "I had the dysentery, sir." "Oh, I am sorry for that; where did you get it?" "In mar goots," came the wholly unexpected reply, which brought the flow of questions to an abrupt end.

Much though the Commander-in-Chief must have wished to push on, there was a vast deal to be done before any further advance could be contemplated. The troops to a great extent required re-clothing, while the Cavalry needed a very large number of remounts, for their losses had been enormous, as the following facts will show.

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The six Cavalry Regiments placed at General French's disposal on March 28th for an attack on the enemy about Karee Siding "could only find mounts for six hundred and fifty men, while the four Horse Artillery Batteries could bring but four guns each into the field." [1] In the study of few campaigns can it be so necessary for the student to check the daily parade states, for the statement that General So-and-so had such-and-such formations placed at his disposal conveys nothing unless the strengths of the individual formations are known.

It was also vital to the success of future operations that the line of railway communication with Cape Town, seven hundred and fifty miles away, should be rendered as secure as possible. This entailed some hard fighting, and it was not till the last day of April that the advance on Pretoria could be resumed.

During the six weeks' halt at Bloemfontein Congreve took part in no affair of any moment, although there was plenty of work to be done. He had time, however, to attend to his correspondence, which, once that rail communication with Cape Town had been opened, flowed in in disconcerting profusion. The mixture of dates was remarkable. On April 6th, for instance, he records in his Diary, "a heap of letters in afternoon, from mother, December 8th, January 11th, 18th, 26th; Celia,[2] October 24th, January 6th, 19th, 25th, March 3rd," and so on. It may be judged from this how often communication with the Base had been severed, and how great were the difficulties with which the Director of Postal Services had to contend.

In a later Diary entry Congreve gives the following curious experience of a letter which eventually reached him. "Letter from Mrs. Wrottesley written just after I left home. Had been to Natal, to Cape Town, to Pretoria for 'Prisoner of War.' Had been censored by

[1] *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 269.
[2] Mrs. Walter Congreve.

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both English and Dutch authorities, sent back to Cape Town, home to England and out here again."

Shortly before leaving Bloemfontein the 18th Infantry Brigade was transferred to the 11th Division, in which was the Guards Brigade, the Divisional Commander being Major-General R. Pole Carew.[1]

Winter had now set in, and in its passage of the great rolling downs of the high veld the army under Lord Roberts was faced with the most trying variations in temperature which "was wont to rise or fall no less than sixty degrees in twelve hours, or less."[2]

It would be tedious to recapitulate the events of each day, for one day was much like another—a long march under a hot sun, varied on occasions by a rear-guard action, in which the enemy generally succeeded in inflicting a maximum of loss on the British with a minimum of loss to himself. For the Staff there was many a weary trudge putting out outposts in the dark, and for all a comfortless bivouac with the thermometer registering sometimes as much as sixteen degrees of frost.

Congreve makes no further reference to a ration shortage excepting only such shortage as might be temporary owing to the late arrival of the transport. What he says about the rum ration will appeal to many who found during the Great War how elusive this particular item might prove to be.

"We get our ration exactly the same as the men, and that sometimes includes rum. This we often don't drink the night it is issued, and most marvellous are its properties. One day when wanted it has evaporated. Another day the servants put it in our morning coffee, but no one detected it. Another day its strength burst

[1] The late Lieutenant-General Sir Reginald Pole Carew, K.C.B., C.V.O.

[2] *Official History*, p. 67. "Almost the whole of the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal east of the Natal railway are high veld, which may be taken to mean any grassland lying at an elevation of about 4,000 feet" (*ibid.*, p. 62).

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the bottle and so on, and goodness knows how often it has been upset. Now we drink it at once to save its life, as it is so volatile."

The absence of Diary entries recording a shortage of supplies is an eloquent testimony to the ability of the Director of Railways,[1] for the attacks on the line were unceasing and the damage done very considerable. To give an idea of the rapidity with which repairs were effected, it is only necessary to quote the Railway record during the period May 3rd to June 11th, 1900. During this time the following temporary repairs were executed: twenty-seven bridges, forty-one culverts, ten miles of line including seven deviations varying in length from two hundred yards to two miles.[2] A most remarkable achievement, it must be admitted.

Sometimes in his Diary Congreve notes down: "Great pig and fowl hunt," and after one such entry he writes home: "Every camp you see is littered with feathers, especially the camps of the M.I. and Cavalry. Someone has written to the *Field* to ask what the disease can be which has made all the fowls of the Transvaal and Free State moult at this time of year!"

As the war went on Congreve formed some strong views on giving the Victoria Cross to officers, and wrote to his wife on the subject: "I should give none to officers on the supposition that they all deserve them, and are only doing their duty, but to N.C.O.'s and men only. . . . I don't, though, think you need be anxious that I shall have mine taken away, for my views are not likely to be adopted." Some will agree with him, none the less, but others will not, and the latter will be justified in pointing out that the East India Company rigorously excluded the names of all European Officers of Native Regiments

[1] Major E. P. C. Girouard, R.E., now Colonel Sir E. P. C. Girouard, K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] *The Rise of Rail Power in War and Conquest*, 1833–1914, p. 244, Edwin A. Pratt (P. S. King & Son, Winchester).

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from participating in any issue of medals during the period 1784 to 1825. To this general rule there was but one single exception, namely, in the case of the Seringapatam medal of 1799. The system of exclusion was finally abandoned in 1826, after which date a general issue to all ranks alike was made in recognition of their services in all subsequent campaigns.[1]

It is also worthy of notice that the absence of any decoration, other than the Order of the Bath—an extremely close preserve—in the Peninsular War and both before that period and after it, often placed Commanders in a very invidious position. The only other means of rewarding distinguished service was by promotion, substantive or Brevet, a method which could be but sparingly employed or the condition of many units who had seen hard fighting would have been one in which "everyone is somebody and no one's anybody." Hence it came about that many most gallant actions went unrewarded, and Commanders were accused—often most unjustly, as in Picton's case[2]—of neglecting the interests of their officers. The existence of some even minor decoration would have obviated this most unfortunate condition of affairs.

It is only fair to Congreve to make it plain that he referred only to material recognition of good work on the part of officers, for no one could possibly have been more prompt in showing his appreciation of good work both verbally and in writing than he.

Congreve, devoted as he was to children, trees and flowers, could not view the track of the war unmoved.

"It is rather depressing," he wrote, "in this land of treelessness to see fruit trees in bloom, and willows and gums in their first spring clothes being cut down by the men for firewood, and deserted and trampled gardens

[1] J. H. Mayo's *Medals and Decorations of the British Army and Navy*, vol. i, Introduction, pp. xxxix and xl.

[2] H. B. Robinson's *Life of Picton*, vol. ii, p. 339.

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find a soft place in my heart and small children's shoes and such-like odds and ends I would rather not see. But I suppose you can't have war pretty. I feel, though, were I a Dutchman and saw my home laid waste, I should not come in and make peace, but stay out and shoot all I could."

Now and again he writes down some story which is going the round of the Army, including one in connection with a clever substitute for a code. "When Mahon [1] was going to the relief of Mafeking, Plumer [2] heliographed to him to ask his strength in men, guns and transport.

"As he was not certain that it was not a Boer heliograph, he answered as follows: 'Strength ten times Naval and Military Club. Guns as many as there are boys in the Ward family.[3] Transport as C.O. of 9th Lancers,' i.e. nine hundred and thirty men, six guns and Little [4] transport. I believe Rhodes concocted it."

Congreve often makes a note of the extraordinary rumours which are so prevalent in war. He had a talk with an English-speaking Dutch girl, who said: "French is dead, Buller mad, and Roberts run away in the balloon. Johannesburg is besieged by us, and in six weeks we shall go back and you will all have run away." And then she added with all the self-assurance of youth, "*You* don't know, but *I* do."

A little later he notes in his Diary another somewhat comic rumour, this time a British one: "Got news that we were to be attacked at dawn by Boers dressed as natives with faces blacked, so stood to arms at 5.30 a.m. and found it very cold. This alarm is called the Christy Minstrel alarm."

[1] General the Right Hon. Sir Bryan Thomas Mahon, P.C., K.C.B., K.C.V.O., D.S.O.

[2] Now Field-Marshal the Lord Plumer, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.

[3] Lord Dudley and his five brothers.

[4] Now Brigadier-General M. O. Little, C.B., C.B.E.

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The entry in his Diary for May 24th, 1900, is interesting, for it shows a marked trait in his character, in that he would never ask anyone to undertake a risky task which he would not undertake himself:

"Water a great difficulty, only one well and that sixty feet deep. R.E. put in two pumps, one after the other, but only to find when completed that they would not work. Eventually had to get what we could with rope and bucket. That fouled about 9 p.m. so I went down with a Welshman and got it clear."

Though he notes this descent of the sixty-foot-deep well in the dark in his Diary he makes no mention of it in any letter.

The appearance of the Infantry as they moved out of their icy bivouacs was remarkable, and Congreve notes in his Diary:

"Men on the march are an extraordinary sight now. Some with old socks on their hands to keep them warm, many with Balaclava caps under their helmets, trousers of all sorts picked up on the road or bought to replace their own worn-out ones, bottles filled with water, water bags, tin pots, bundles of sticks, frying-pans, in short, every conceivable thing useful and useless hung all over them. A man of the Scots Guards was carrying a huge Dutch Family Bible. All alike are black with dirt due to marching all day over the veld burnt by the Boers and shortness of water and opportunity for washing."

In his Diary and letters Congreve made frequent reference to his admiration for the Mounted Infantry, the first into every action and the last out of it.

"Every day the Mounted Infantry do things far more deserving of V.C.'s than anything anyone did at Colenso. Every time they go out scouting they go in cold blood, with their lives in their hands, for every tree and every stone may have a bullet behind it, and yet they go quite cheerily and nearly every day some one of them gets

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killed or fearfully wounded. I would give 'em all V.C.'s. Grand, dirty, thieving fellows they are, but I admire 'em more than all the V.C.'s in the British Army."

This admiration, however, was often tempered by the loss of one or other of his two ponies, "Kitchener" and the precious "Cronje," a loss which fortunately proved temporary only, for in every case the missing pony was discovered in the lines of the nearest M.I. Battalion!

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CHAPTER VI

IN THE TRANSVAAL

ON June 5th the Army marched into Pretoria, which had surrendered unconditionally.

His Diary entry for June 10th runs as follows: "Thanksgiving Service in Pretoria. Our padre took a very cheery view of things, talked of the war being over, and foreseeing trees all over the land, cottages, happy homes and I don't know what else. A little premature, I fear." The dubious note was fully justified, for two years more of war were to bring it home to such as had not realised it before that in states so vast in area and with a system of Government so little centralised as was the case with the two Dutch Republics, the occupation of capitals was of small moment militarily speaking.

Very shortly after the occupation of Pretoria, de Wet captured and burnt a mail train at Roodeval. A rumour of this occurrence having reached Congreve, he wrote to his wife:

"There is a horrible rumour that de Wet has cut the line in the Free State and burnt several hundred sacks of mails which were lying at rail-head. I don't think though he can have been such a savage, for it would be a most useless piece of annoyance and in no way affecting the issues of the war."

There is, however, a good deal to be said for de Wet's point of view, for the regular receipt of their letters from home has a very excellent effect on troops, is very good for their *moral,* in fact. Few things indeed help more to make troops contented, while contrariwise the non-receipt of letters makes them think that they are being

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neglected. Of this there are many instances in British Military History.

During the Seven Years' War of 1756–63, at any rate as far as the operations in North America and Canada were concerned, there was a most lamentable lack of postal organisation. It appears to have been nobody's business to ensure that the troops got their letters. Mails were sent out by any ship that happened to be handy. So slack sometimes were those to whose care mails were committed, that on one occasion the Captain of a ship forgot to deliver the mail-bags and took them back to England again.[1]

On another occasion upwards of forty letters for the 43rd Regiment lay for some time in the post office at Halifax. There being a charge to be levied in connection with the forwarding of these letters on from Halifax, and the local postmaster not knowing how he should be repaid, the difficulty was solved by sending all the letters back to New York, where they were lost.

The neglect of the postal service at this time was the more cruel, because for a great part of the period during which operations were carried on in Canada and North America, regiments were scattered about, split up in a number of posts and small detachments, and suffered very great hardships. Small wonder that the non-receipt of their letters made them feel that their country had forgotten their existence.

When the British Army landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1854, *en route* to the Crimea, such postal arrangements as existed were in the hands of our Allies the French, who demanded the sum of 3*s.* 8*d.* per letter on delivery. In spite of this heavy charge there was con-

[1] Knox's *Historical Journal*, edition A. G. Doughty. Postal arrangements in Canada seem to have left something to be desired as late as 1802, for in that year "the authorities gave it as their opinion that eight years was too long for a letter to remain in the dead letter office in Canada" (*ibid*, p. 171).

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siderable keenness on the part of officers at least to claim such letters as came for them by the first mail. As, however, on inspection the bulk of these letters were found to be bills, enthusiasm on the advent of the next mail was found to have considerably diminished. On the arrival of the British Army in the Crimea, some attempt was made to provide a regular postal service, but even as late as twelve months after the outbreak of the war, the British Army Postal Service in the Crimea was described as "a system of organised disappointment." Yet an efficient service would have meant much to troops who, ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-warmed and ill-sheltered, were enduring all the misery of that first Crimean winter.

For another reason, too, the capture of mails is of importance from a military point of view, for the homeward-bound letters are a sure guide to the *moral* of the Army, while the outward-bound ones give a very true picture of the state of mind existing on what the Germans were so fond of describing as "the home front."

What deductions de Wet made from his examination of the British mails at Roodeval is not known, but he is said to have expressed considerable surprise at the number of young women with whom the average Englishman appeared capable of carrying on a most intense correspondence, all at the same time!

Before leaving the subject it is interesting to note that one solitary item of Congreve's correspondence was rescued from the burning at Roodeval, though it was possibly not the one which he would have chosen had the choice lain with himself. Apropos of this he notes in his Diary on June 25th: "De Wet has burnt, I fear, my new jacket, of which I got only the bill!"

The next two months were spent by the 18th Infantry Brigade partly at Edendale and partly at Balmoral. The Brigade saw no fighting, though alarmist rumours were the cause of the troops standing to arms exposed to the

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bitter cold of many a winter's night,[1] awaiting an attack which never materialised.

Clearing the countryside was uncongenial work, absolutely necessary though it was if the enemy's Intelligence Service was to be successfully countered. In his Diary entry for July 10th Congreve writes:

"All the Christian natives of Churchstadt, as the Edendale village is called, were ordered to be sent in to Fabricken, so they were collected outside our house, men, women and children, a sad sight, so much so that the General,[2] on hearing that no proper shelter was prepared for them, told them they could go back to the village. They cheered, then formed up and sang 'The Old Hundredth' in excellent tune and harmony. It was quite like the New Testament days and very affecting."

However, the exigencies of the service demanded that the original orders should be carried out, and the Diary entry for July 11th reads: "Our protégés of the village sent in after all, though General Stephenson did all he could."

In the surrendering of arms there was at times a touch of humour, and Congreve notes in his Diary: "An old Boer who had been at the battle of Boemplatz in 1848 surrendered to-day and brought in his arms, a very ancient flintlock, with the barrel fastened on with wire and hide, his ammunition bits of nails, old springs, etc., his powder in an old ox-horn." Those who have been present at a surrender of arms on the North-west Frontier of India will recall similar instances of the artless surrender of antique weapons—and the attempted retention of up-to-date ones.

The unpleasant fact that the war would prove a very long one was beginning to be generally accepted, but to Congreve, who hated notoriety or publicity in any form,

[1] Congreve on several occasions records ice a quarter of an inch thick.

[2] Major-General T. E. Stephenson, C.B.

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the prospect, depressing though it was, possessed one advantage, for he writes: "I am thankful to think that by the time I get home my 'celebrityship' will have been forgotten; it is one great recompense for being kept out here so long."

From Edendale Congreve paid several visits to Pretoria, where he was always sure to come across some friends and acquaintances. Amongst others he met two of the four Argentines who had escorted Legge and himself from Enslin to Waterval Drift. One of them said he was now riding the twentieth horse issued to him since his enlistment four months before, a very striking commentary on the horse wastage which reached such appalling figures during the war.

If a man who was used to horses could expend so many as twenty in so short a period, what must have been the loss in the case of men whose knowledge of riding and horsemastership was limited to what they could learn during the war.

During this period of military inactivity the 18th Infantry Brigade maintained a very efficient football team, and played many matches in which Congreve never failed to take part. Few men of thirty-eight still take an active part in the game, fewer still would do so if they were martyrs to asthma. Congreve no doubt played in order to set an example of keenness and energy, but the day was passed when he could find any pleasure in the game. In writing to his wife he says: "I have played four times in the last week, and I get worse and worse at it. After this campaign I play no more, it hurts and does not amuse me."

Occasionally he mentions some novel which has been sent out to him. Writing to his wife apropos of a book which he has just received from her, he admits to having been rather bored by it. He thinks too that the author has given an unduly pessimistic picture of the relationship between the sexes, though he adds: "I am bound

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to admit that nothing that men and women can do can surprise me in the least," a tolerant outlook on life in which members of the Medical and Legal professions, who see human nature as it is, will be found to agree with him.

In the middle of August the 11th Division, and with it the 18th Infantry Brigade, took the field for operations in the Eastern Transvaal. The Division saw but little fighting, but there were at times great physical difficulties to be overcome. These Congreve describes in a letter dated Helvetia, September 1st:

"We got here with the loss of two waggons only, though it certainly can't be called a carriage road. My Brigade had twelve miles of waggons to guard, so we did not make any sensational distances! Several places we dug waggons out, at others we had to make roads across the bog by putting in fruit trees which were fortunately growing hard by. The climax was a pass over a ridge nearly seven thousand feet high,[1] and steep as a house downhill. So steep that waggons had to be let down by ropes, though their wheels were scotched by the brakes, which are exceptionally powerful in this country. All the time we had to take elaborate precautions against attack, and so it was on the whole a tiresome job and we were all glad to get in here."

At Helvetia a junction was made with Sir Redvers Buller's army, and Congreve met again a number of old friends in his Regiment whom he had not seen since the opening days of the Natal campaign. He records a story about Sir Redvers Buller which, though well known at the time, may be new to the rising generation. "Sir Redvers Buller had a lot of champagne coming out, and to avoid its being looted *en route* he had it labelled 'castor oil.' It did not arrive, so he wired to the Disembarking Officer at Durban to look it up, and said

[1] Such heights are relative only, for the high veld round Helvetia has an altitude of six thousand feet and at Belfast another five hundred feet more.

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'urgently wanted.' The reply was: 'Cannot find cases, but have bought up all castor oil here for immediate use, and have wired Cape Town for further supplies.'"

On the conclusion of the operations the 18th Infantry Brigade was located at Barberton. In writing to his wife Congreve mentions the game he has seen and he goes on to say:

"Every year I care less for shooting. I like to see the beasts and birds, but I like to see them alive; when I do shoot one I always wish I had not. I suppose I shall go on shooting, fishing and hunting whenever I get the chance, but I honestly would rather—except for the exercise it gives one—saw a piece of wood, or play with a lathe, or an engine, or a garden. I should like to stalk wild animals with a camera, as some people have done very successfully."

A letter written about this time to Billy, aged eight, is of special interest. Billy, dressed as a Rifleman, had been helping at a bazaar in connection with a war charity, and his father mentions this in his letter and expresses the hope that some day Billy will make "a good Rifleman." This expression when used by Congreve meant a good deal, for in his eyes a man must needs be of very fine character to deserve it. The reader will meet with this particular expression later and under very grievous circumstances.

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CHAPTER VII

ON LORD KITCHENER'S STAFF

AT the end of October Congreve paid a visit to Pretoria, a visit which had a very considerable influence on his career. What took place is described in a letter to his father. "When I was in Pretoria I saw —— in his office, and he told me that they were short of a D.A.A.G., so I said: 'Oh, you'd better take me.' He said: 'All right.'"

On second thoughts Congreve had misgivings as to his wisdom in accepting the new post, and he says: "So I wrote to —— and said that I had changed my mind. Imagine therefore my horror on getting back to Barberton to find a telegram: 'C.-in-C. has selected Captain Congreve for appointment D.A.A.G. Headquarters. If agreeable to him he should come in here at once.'" The wording of this telegram will cause to smile those who were accustomed to the peremptory style of similar telegrams in the Great War, telegrams in which such expressions as "if agreeable" did not figure.

The wording of the telegram gave Congreve the option of refusing the appointment at G.H.Q., which placed him in a quandary. "I did not know what to do," he wrote to his father, "so telegraphed to ask Lyttelton [1] what he advised, and he said: 'You certainly ought to accept,' so here I am on the way to Pretoria. . . ." Having arrived at G.H.Q. he wrote again to his father: "Everyone thinks I was right to come here, and I am glad I have now I have done it, but I hate making up my mind in such things and I also hate changing."

[1] Now General the Right Hon. Sir N. G. Lyttelton, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.

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To those who knew Congreve's most resolute character this uncertainty of mind may come as a surprise. The explanation, however, seems simple enough, and is that he had not yet found his true *métier*, which lay in command, and not, efficient Brigade-Major though he had been, in employment on the Staff. When, eventually, he obtained a command, he came to realise how pre-eminently suited for that rôle he was. Certain it is that during the Great War and after he never hesitated for a moment in shouldering the responsibilities of high command, no matter in what shape it was offered him.

Congreve had only been a day at Pretoria when he received a telegram ordering him to go to Johannesburg to see Lord Roberts. The latter was now on his way home, having been appointed Commander-in-Chief on the retirement of Lord Wolseley, and he was anxious to get Congreve's opinion upon certain proposed changes in the musketry regulations which the lessons of the war seemed to make advisable. With Lord Roberts at Johannesburg was Lord Kitchener, who was succeeding the Field-Marshal in South Africa.

After his interview with Lord Roberts, Congreve returned to Pretoria and wrote to his father:

"I wonder what next will befall me. I don't think anyone has gone through so many changes in a year as I have. D.I.M. Aldershot, Captain 2nd Battalion,[1] Galloper to Lyttelton, Press Censor, a hospital patient, Adjutant Irregular Horse, Brigade-Major and D.A.A.G., eight distinct changes and about 3,000 miles of travelling and marching thrown in."

However, he was by no means at the end of his experiences, for on the last day of November Lord Kitchener returned from Johannesburg, sent for Congreve, and to the latter's great astonishment asked if he "would like to be his Private Secretary and Assistant

[1] Rifle Brigade.

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Military Secretary," a post which Congreve accepted at once.

As Assistant Military Secretary, Congreve came under Colonel Hamilton,[1] the Military Secretary, but as Private Secretary he dealt direct with Lord Kitchener. His new appointment was a most advantageous one. Though the office hours were long and irksome, and though a good deal of his energy was expended "in answering people who write petitions and begging for autographs and such-like fools," [2] he was brought into touch with everyone who was anybody in the British military world, and this was a great asset. Further, and this was even more important, his position as Private Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief brought him into an atmosphere of big affairs and broad views which could not be otherwise than most valuable to an officer who aspired to high command.

Hitherto the writer of this Memoir has depended for his information for the most part on Congreve's Diary and his letters to his wife, but henceforward, so far as the Boer War is concerned, it will be necessary to rely entirely on other sources of information, for not only the Diary covering the remainder of the war, but also all his letters to his wife during that period have unaccountably vanished. Many letters addressed to his parents and other members of his family have been preserved, but to the biographer nothing can quite compensate for the loss of the Diary and the letters to Mrs. Congreve.

Before taking over his new duties Congreve had been led to believe that Lord Kitchener was far from being an easy master to serve. Fortunately matters turned out to be very different from what he had expected, and

[1] The late Major-General Hubert I. W. Hamilton, C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., killed in action October 14th, 1914.

[2] Other Private Secretaries have been plagued in a similar manner. *Vide Home Letters of General Sherman*, p. 340: "Hitchcock writes private letters not needing my personal attention, such as autographs and locks of hair."

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in writing to his mother he says: "I am most greatly surprised by Lord K. I had expected to find him very difficult. Nothing could be nicer than he is. Very quick in making up his mind, and talks quite openly and discusses anything you like to suggest to him about men or matters." Nor was this favourable impression a fleeting one, for six months later Congreve writes: "The more I see of K. the more I like him, which is well, as I see a good deal."

On one point Lord Kitchener and his Private Secretary did not see eye to eye.

"I send out," writes Congreve to his mother, "a daily summary of events to all stations in South Africa. It is not a pleasing job, for I am constantly putting in things K. does not like. He would prefer to publish nothing, but as it is the only news officers and men ever hear in out-of-the-way places, I make it as full as I dare, and chance discovery."

Congreve could not have shown in a more practical manner his sympathy for the Regimental Officer and man who bore the burden and heat of the day.

He wrote very fully by each mail to his parents. The letters, however, contain little of any general interest, being mostly taken up with family affairs at home and the doings of relations and mutual friends in the war. Sometimes he writes at length to his mother, giving charming descriptions of new flowers in general and roses in particular that he has seen, for mother and son possessed in their love of gardens a great bond in common. Now and again a gleam of light is thrown upon some trait in his own character. Mr. Congreve had offered to pay for Billy's education, and Walter Congreve writes: "I can't say how good of you I think it is to offer to pay Bill's schooling for me, but, don't think me proud, I really would rather you did not do so now, for as long as I am out here I can very well afford

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to pay it myself." He then goes on to say that another member of the family needs help more than he does himself, and he suggests that his father might give some assistance in this particular case.

On military affairs he maintains a strict reticence as befits an officer holding so confidential a post. Once in a way, however, he lifts the veil a little, and we catch a glimpse of the net spread for de Wet. The net is drawn and hopes run high, for it is known that many fish are entrapped. But, alas, there is a rent in the net, and this the fishermen had not noticed! But the big fish, on whose capture so much depended, had not failed to notice it and, for the twentieth time, had slipped through the hole to safety.

We get glimpses, too, of Lord Kitchener in varying mood: now bearing up stoutly under his continued disappointments; now, though but rarely, showing signs of strain. In these weaker moments, when out riding, the sorely tried Commander-in-Chief would "keep on saying 'O Lord, how much longer is this going on?' Then," writes Congreve, "it is dismal; on the whole, however, he is pretty cheerful."

He often refers in his letters to the number of people who write to him for this and that. Some asking him to look up or to send news of a sick or wounded relation; others asking for some appointment for themselves or for somebody else. In deserving cases Congreve would take an infinity of trouble; in others he says that he has written shortly, not to say curtly, declining to move in the matter. At times his temper boils over, and he writes that "So-and-so ought to be kicked," and then, as if in doubt whether the punishment would be administered with sufficient vigour, he adds: "I would like to have the kicking of him myself." Some of the requests that he receives are merely tiresome. "I had," he writes, "a letter this week from ——, asking me for a photograph of myself. Why on earth should she

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want one? She has done very nicely without it up to now." And he adds: "She writes a very dull letter." This last is unpardonable, and he thinks that he will "forget to send the photograph."

Amongst Congreve's many tasks not the least trying was the ceaseless interviewing of people demanding to see Lord Kitchener.

"I get," he writes, "the most extraordinary people to interview. They all think they can go straight in to Lord K., and I have much ado at times to persuade them that they can't. Women are especially importunate. One day three Dutch women of the cottage class came with no English, and after, with a good deal of trouble, getting an interpreter, I found they demanded clothes from Lord K. because they had a son serving in some Irregular Corps, and they would hardly go away till I left them and put a stalwart sentry on to them. The number of ladies who have daughters dying of consumption or going to have babies and who must, therefore, return to Pretoria or Johannesburg at once is legion."

Applications to return were often made in other and more artless letters. "Children write and say they hope to do like him, and ladies write that they love him, and so on," a display of affection which was sadly thrown away upon a hard-hearted Private Secretary. For such correspondents Pretoria and Johannesburg remained as far off as ever.

The daily drudgery was sometimes relieved by a little most welcome music, in which connection Congreve writes in a letter:

"Our new house has electric light and a piano, a very good one, and it is a great pleasure when we can get anyone to play to us. Miss Estcourt plays well and one or two men, notably Henderson,[1] Director of Military Intelligence. I listen and go to sleep in my chair sometimes!"

[1] The late Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, author of *Stonewall Jackson*.

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The tendency to go to sleep after dinner, though, was not confined to Pretoria, as many of Walter Congreve's friends will have remarked!

Sometimes, but not often, a gleam of humour comes to G.H.Q. from the front, and is gratefully recorded by Congreve, who on one such occasion writes: "Several Boers having been captured by our men were anxious as to how they would be disposed of. One man to comfort them said, 'Well, you will go to Ceylon for sure, and for a start you'll do a couple of years grooming elephants. They are a bit awkward at first, but you will come to it.'" After this who shall say that the British soldier is lacking in imagination?

Thus the year 1901 dragged wearily to its close, though for Congreve at least there was one bright spot, for with his promotion to Major on December 21st of that year came the Brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

In April of the following year, Mrs. Congreve with Geoffrey arrived at Cape Town. As far as the chances of husband and wife meeting went it was a case of so near and yet so far, but things very unexpectedly took a most favourable turn, and Congreve was able to write to his mother:

"This will be a very mean letter, for I was all put upside down by Lord K., who called out as I was passing his room that he wished me to go down to Cape Town tomorrow to take the mails. It is now close on 6 p.m., and I start at daybreak to-morrow, so you may imagine that I have not much time to spare. Celia does not know, but I shall telegraph to her to-morrow. What put it into his head I have no idea, unless it was a very pronounced wheeze which I have had for the last week and he wanted to be rid of me."

The motive attributed to Lord Kitchener for his action was far from being correct as Congreve himself, after reflection, came to recognise.

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"I am writing," he says, "in the train on my way to Cape Town. I fancy, really, to see Celia and Geoffrey, but nominally on business for Lord Kitchener. He ordered me to go down to Cape Town and invented a job for me, so here I am in the express which does the journey in two days and three nights, and has a dining-saloon on it in which they seem to do one very well. I am in charge of the Headquarters mail bags, so have a whole carriage to myself, and can do what I like. I shall be away ten or eleven days, bringing the mail back."

While Lord Kitchener was not one to wear his heart upon his sleeve, he was nonetheless very capable of kindly action at times, though the recipient of his kindness was often given no inkling whatever as to the reason for his benefactor's action.[1]

The result to Congreve of Lord Kitchener's thoughtfulness was a happy week spent with his wife and boy at Cape Town, which made a more than welcome break in the monotony of the war.

From the beginning of April the prospects of peace gradually grew distinctly brighter as the direct result of Lord Kitchener's great drives, the object of which, to put it shortly, was to pin down the enemy in any particular area between the pursuing columns and the fortified and heavily wired blockhouse line.

Congreve gives in a letter a brief description of one of these famous drives.

"Henry Buller and I went, leaving Pretoria in the afternoon; and the armoured trains were spread out all along the line, one to each section, and patrolled up and down till they met each other. We were passed from station to station this way, and I think were in quite five before we got to the one we were to stop in, which was commanded by Pritchard, whom I used to see a great deal of on the range at Aldershot. The Admiral of Armoured Trains, whose guest we were, had his carriage

[1] For several very human touches about Lord Kitchener see the *Memoir of Brigadier-General Frank Maxwell, V.C.*, written by his wife, pp. 81 *et seq.*

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LORD KITCHENER AND STAFF, 1901

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attached to this train, and we lived with him in it. The trains really are more like ships than trains. They have a permanent crew of two officers and about thirty men, a gun detachment, a searchlight, are covered with iron bullet-proof plates, and nearly all have their name painted on like a ship has. Ours was H.M.A.T. *Cobra,* with a picture of the reptile, which was alone enough to frighten Boers. After dinner, during which we were getting to our place on the line, our searchlight was lit, and we began to patrol slowly up and down with our light turned over the veld in the direction from which the Boers were supposed to be coming. None came, for the excellent reason that they had all broken out to the side that night, but this we did not know, so the excitement was kept up.

"At daybreak on Sunday we moved down in a thick mist to a coal-mine about three miles off the main line along a siding that had not been used for over two years, and was so overgrown with grass that we had to keep throwing sand under the wheels to make them bite on the rails. We got there eventually and lay up behind the colliery buildings, waiting for the mist to rise and disclose Boers for us to shoot at. It did rise at last, but there were no Boers and never were any all day.

"We sat on the top of the mine-shaft head gear and had a grand view over miles of country, and at last saw our own columns coming into view over the horizon, a very pretty sight, first a few black dots which gradually got thicker and thicker till they covered the whole country in view, and eventually got into men and horses with their supports and reserves behind. We waited till they came up pretty close and then set off for home, but before we left there was a good deal of firing on the left of the line, and very nice it was to see the way all the troops in hearing of it at once galloped towards it. It turned out to be some of our tame Burghers firing at a herd of blesbok, and very dangerous they were, for several of their bullets came over us and amongst the mounted men. We got back to Pretoria about midnight, and I was very glad to have been, for everything was complete except the coming of the Boers, and that no one can guarantee.

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"The whole drive—and it took six columns, six or seven armoured trains and a whole heap of men spread along the railway line and covering miles of country—only produced THREE men. They all got out at night through a gap between two columns, and now that I have seen the tremendous extent of country we cover in these drives I am more astonished that they do not always get out than that they sometimes do. It says a great deal for our men's keenness and discipline that they make them successful. For it means that for three and three-quarter, four or more days everyone is marching all day and on outpost all night."

As May wore on the prospect of an early termination to the war continued to improve, and in the middle of the month those negotiations were begun which were to be crowned with complete success on May 31st.

Thus the prolonged struggle at last came to an end. Little can any of those who witnessed the passing of the two Dutch Republics have foreseen that twelve years later a United South Africa, inspired by Louis Botha,[1] would stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the British Empire in the Great War.

[1] For a charming appreciation of this truly great man see Lord Buxton's *General Botha*.

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CHAPTER VIII

ON THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT'S STAFF

THE war being over Congreve, accompanied by "Cronje," in due course returned to England. He was anxious to remain at home, for his father had died in 1902, the Burton estate had been sold, and there was much family business to be attended to. Hence, he very gladly accepted the post of Military Secretary to H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, then Commander-in-Chief in Ireland. The appointment carried with it very comfortable quarters within the Royal Hospital, and in these very charming surroundings Congreve and his family lived until the expiration of the Duke's tenure of the command.

Congreve's Diary is available for the period of his residence in Ireland. It contains very little of military interest, but it provides a very accurate picture of a world which, for good or ill, has completely passed away. To the soldier it was a very pleasant world, for to him was extended much hospitality and many opportunities for shooting and fishing, amenities for which few other stations were equally distinguished.

On reading his Diary one is struck with Congreve's restless energy. Riding, bicycling, walking—when by himself he very seldom drove—hockey, gardening, carpentering, he was always doing something active. He found time too for a certain amount of fishing and a good deal of shooting, especially during his boys' holidays, for he was the most companionable of fathers. His Diary duly records the red-letter days, such as Billy's first day to hounds and his first woodcock, great events both of them in the life of a boy of twelve.

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Geoffrey's first ride—on the precious "Cronje"—is recorded too.

To one so passionately fond of music as Walter Congreve the beautiful services at Christ Church and St. Patrick's, besides frequent secular concerts, were a very great attraction, while the introduction of the motor-car and its ever increasing employment in military affairs enabled him to see much lovely scenery that would otherwise have been beyond his reach.

A visit of inspection to Tralee took the Duke of Connaught and his Staff through Killarney, but the weather was not favourable, and Congreve writes in his Diary:

"*October 12th,* 1903.—A hopeless wet day, and all the scenery blotted out, which was sad, as we went through Killarney."

Two days later the Diary entry runs:

"*October 14th.*—Left Lough Swilly station by a toy railway for Falcaragh beyond Letterkenny to stay with Sir J. Olpherts. The last part of the journey very pretty, all through the mountains and bogs full of beautiful colours. Fine wild scenery, but its prevailing note is sadness, and I felt none of the joy which beauty generally gives me. Arrived at 3.30. A very nice house full of pretty things and a beautiful garden where everything will grow that is not blown over or killed by rabbits."

"*October 15th.*—Sir John showed me his garden. Fuchsias, hydrangeas, blue gums and all the African lilies grow well out of doors, and he has strawberries now ripe."

Two or three Diary entries merit quotation. Congreve used to attend very regularly the lectures on military subjects that were given from time to time in Dublin, and his comments thereon are always brief and to the point. "*February 2nd,* 1903.—To lecture on Staff rides, by Haking,[1] Staff College. Very good, but the discussion afterwards most futile."

[1] Now General Sir R. C. B. Haking, G.B.E., K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

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The fact is Staff rides, as they were called, were but little understood in those days. In this connection the writer is reminded of a story which was told him by a friend, alas killed in the War! This friend was on the Staff of one of the Commands about this time, and his General, though a most distinguished officer, had till recently held appointments in which the up-to-date training of troops had played no part. Faced with the necessity for holding a Staff ride the General instructed the writer's friend to prepare the scheme. This was done, and the exercise was duly carried out without any hitch. There followed the concluding Conference, and for this the author of the scheme had drafted a few criticisms of an apparently harmless nature, such as would be unlikely to promote controversy. Unfortunately, as bad luck would have it, the very first piece of criticism was taken exception to by a very able officer who, jumping to his feet, contested his view of the case at considerable length and with some little heat. What was worse, he was evidently in the right.

The officer who told the writer the story was much perturbed; he felt that he had let his General down; that he had landed him in a hole from which escape with dignity would be impossible. He need have had no such qualms, for his General, though he knew little of Staff rides, knew much of men and affairs. So, the moment that the speaker had resumed his seat, the General took up the running, and, speaking in a tone which brooked no argument, he said: "I have listened with the closest attention to what Colonel So-and-So has had to say, and I still adhere to my former opinion. We will now go on to the next point." After this there was obviously nothing more to be said, and the remaining criticisms having proved to be of a non-provocative nature the Conference came to an end without further incident, and the officers taking part gradually left the room. As the door closed behind the last of them, the wise old General turned with

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a smile to his somewhat harassed Staff Officer and said: "Johnny, when you know nothing say nothing."

Promotion examinations, a quarter of a century ago, were not the searching affairs that they have since become, as the following entries will show:

"*August 17th,* 1903.—To Curragh at 12.30, and all round the country on bicycle to see the ground for my exam. for tactical fitness." [1]

"*August 18th.*—Parade at 8.15 at Mallicks Hotel to command an army of one Squadron, two guns and a Battalion, total force certainly not more than two hundred all told. The Infantry had been sent to wrong place, so we imagined them. I had to hold the roads going east of Curragh as a rear-guard. Battle over by 11 a.m."

On the following day the examination was resumed, Congreve being called upon to command a Battalion in the field. Apparently he was galloping about, as many others in similar case have done before and since, in an effort to exercise a personal control which would be impracticable under modern rifle fire. The President of the Examining Board was, however, a man of resource, and he reduced the personal control to something more in keeping with the requirements of actual war. About this Congreve writes:

"*August 19th.*—More exam., I commanding a Battalion in a battle. I had the Lancashire Fusiliers, and they worked very well. My horse was 'shot'!"

From this ordeal Congreve emerged with flying colours, as need hardly be said.

Several very enjoyable bachelor dinners are mentioned in the Diary, one in particular deserving special notice.

[1] For the command of a battalion.

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"*December 12th*, 1903.—Dined with Mr. Justice Ross, P.C.,[1] at Corinthian Club to meet H. E.[2] A most amusing evening, excellent speeches, full of wit, excellent dinner and first-rate music. My host one of the best speakers there."

Dublin has never lacked good raconteurs and wits, and there was an officer justly famed in this direction in Dublin about this time of whom the following story is told. This genial soul, often mentioned in Congreve's Diary, had a brother, whom he had not seen for many years, employed in a vessel plying between certain Australian ports. This vessel was wrecked and the bulk of her crew were drowned, but amongst the survivors was the brother referred to who, being a very strong swimmer, eventually reached land, much scored by barnacles and much scared by sharks. Thinking that his brother in Dublin would have seen some mention of the wreck in the Press and might therefore be feeling some anxiety, he cabled tersely and economically the single word: "Saved!" The cablegram duly reached Dublin and sorely puzzled the recipient, for he had heard nothing of the wreck. After much thought he came to the conclusion that his brother—none too soon, possibly—had entered into a state of grace, so he cabled back equally tersely and economically the single word: "Hallelujah!" levity that was but coldly received at the other end!

Congreve's Diary for 1904 opens in quite Pepysian style:

"*January 1st*, 1904.—At Royal Hospital, Dublin, as A.M.S. to Duke of Connaught, and living inside the building. Family consists of my wife Celia, and three boys, Billy 13, Geoffrey 6½, Christopher 8 months."

There follows a list of servants both indoor and outdoor, together with the wages of each. So Pepysian is

[1] The Right Hon. Sir John Ross, Bart., P.C.

[2] The Lord-Lieutenant, the Earl of Dudley, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.

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his tone that one quite expects to find the entry ending with a survey of his financial position such as inevitably would have been made by the greatest of all Diarists.

For the rest his Diary contains much detail of hospitality received and, it must be added, returned, for an endless stream of guests passed through the Congreves' house in the Royal Hospital.

Early in May the Duke of Connaught's period of command came to an end. The Duchess and he had made themselves greatly beloved, and the approach of the day fixed for their leaving Ireland was viewed with much regret. The Diary entry for May 6th runs:

"Their Royal Highnesses, the whole family, came in in afternoon to say good-bye. To North Wall at night to see them off. A great crowd all the way along the quays and much genuine sorrow at their departure."

It was with very real regret that Congreve and his wife left Dublin, for life had been very enjoyable, the only drawback having been his repeated attacks of asthma, which had been so little troublesome in South Africa and so much the reverse since his return home.

The Duke of Connaught having been appointed Inspector-General to the Forces, Congreve remained with him as his Private Secretary. This necessitated taking a house in London. Life in London lacked many of the attractions of Dublin, for exercise was much harder to obtain. Obtained it was, however, by walking and often by bicycling, though bicycling in the streets of London was not everyone's amusement, even as traffic was in those days. London had, nonetheless, one great advantage in that Billy, now at Eton, was more get-at-able, and father and son managed to spend some very pleasant hours together now and then in term time.

The first attempt at a meeting was not altogether successful, for Congreve had sent Billy a telegram inviting him to run up to London, but Billy's tutor had seen

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many such telegrams in his time and they had not always turned out to be what they appeared; it is a wicked world. Hence telegrams were distinctly suspect. The Diary entry for June 18th therefore runs:

"Expected Billy for the day, but he telegraphed to say he could not come on authority of a telegram, which was all I had sent him. A great disappointment, as we had mapped out a happy day and were much looking forward to it."

The next attempt was more fortunate, as the Diary shows:

"*June 24th,* 1904.—In afternoon took Billy to Earl's Court, and went in everything, including the flying machine, which is a vile thing and made us all feel more or less ill, the water chute, floating punts through dark passages illuminated at intervals, most gruesome wax-works, 'Story of a Cruise,' shooting galleries and other delights. Billy went back at seven, after dinner."

In June of this year Congreve spent a very enjoyable day at his old school Harrow.

"*June 29th,* 1904.—By 11.15 train to Harrow for Speech Day and was entertained with great honour, being set at the Head Master's table and made to return thanks for the visitors. A lovely day and had a very pleasant time. Sat next to Dr. Butler, who was very pleasant and spoke very well, and said very pretty things about me. Dr. Wood, the Head Master, also charming. The concert very good and the old songs quite affecting."

Since his return home Congreve had inspected many properties with a view to purchase, and in September of 1904 he decided to purchase Chartley Castle in Staffordshire.

His Diary at this period tells us little of professional matters, but as far as his service on the Staff of the Inspector-General to the Forces is concerned there was,

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probably, little of great military interest to record, though no doubt by accompanying the Duke of Connaught on his ceaseless inspections Congreve obtained a first-hand acquaintance with the various arms which could not but be of the greatest value to him later on.

For the rest Congreve took full advantage of the facilities which London offered to anyone whose tastes lay in the direction of music, pictures and the drama, while by constantly adding to an already large acquaintance, he showed his appreciation of Pope's dictum that:

"The proper study of mankind is man,"

a study which is all important to him who would command men.

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CHAPTER IX

REGIMENTAL SOLDIERING AND HYTHE

CONGREVE received the C.B. and a Brevet Colonelcy [1] in 1905, and in May of the following year his appointment on the Duke of Connaught's Staff having terminated, he was posted as Second-in-Command to the 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade at Devonport. A return to a Battalion was very pleasant, and it was also very useful to him, for he had seen no regimental service for the past eight years.

In the spring of 1908 he won the Battalion Point-to-Point Race "over a stiff course, beginning on the steep slope of Dartmoor, the obstacles consisting of banks, walls, gullies and small water-jumps.[2] The distance was four miles, and there were fifteen starters, Congreve winning a good race by half a length.

Of this period in Congreve's career there is little else to record. One incident, however, is worthy of note, for it shows his very genuine sympathy for children. On one occasion he was with his Battalion on a march through Devonport. Among a number of street urchins keeping pace with the troops was one who was much handicapped by wearing what were evidently his father's cast-off boots. Congreve called the boy up to him and handed him over to a Corporal, telling the latter to take the child into the nearest boot shop and buy him a pair of boots. It would have occurred to few men to do this act of kindness, and fewer still under the circumstances would have translated thought into action.

It will be remembered that having spent two years at Oxford Congreve had joined the Army somewhat older

[1] June 4th, 1905. [2] *Rifle Brigade Chronicle*, 1908, p. 171.

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than his contemporaries, and he now found himself badly placed for the command of his Regiment on account of his age. He therefore decided to leave the Rifle Brigade and proceeded on half-pay.

There followed rather more than a year on half-pay which terminated in September 1909, when Congreve, now a Substantive Colonel,[1] was appointed Commandant of the School of Musketry at Hythe.[2]

In the days of Congreve's immediate predecessors[3] radical alterations had been made in the musketry training of the British Army in consequence of the lessons learnt in the Boer War. Disappearing targets, snap shooting and rapid fire had to a large extent taken the place of the old bull's-eye practices. Such revolutionary changes could not be expected to appeal to all old habitués of Bisley, and the storm raised had not altogether died down by the autumn of 1909, but Congreve's great tact and personal charm proved equal to the task of smoothing away difficulties as they arose.

Congreve took a very close personal interest in the Senior Officers' Courses,[4] which were of immense value and interest, the programmes being so carefully thought out and arranged that those who attended the Courses left the school convinced of the soundness of its Commandant and its teaching.

We have no details of the demonstrations carried out for the benefit of the Senior Officers' Course, but no doubt occasionally some demonstrations did not work out according to plan. Such little contretemps have not been unknown in more recent times, apropos of which the writer has been told the following story. An exercise had been arranged to demonstrate the effect of a certain number of rounds on a certain target in a certain period

[1] July 8th, 1908.
[2] September 5th, 1909.
[3] Colonel Monro, the late General Sir C. C. Monro, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.S.I., and Colonel, now Major-General Granville Egerton, C.B.
[4] Initiated by Colonel Monro.

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of time, and the firing having duly taken place the officer in charge of the demonstration, accompanied by the Senior Officers attending the Course, walked up the range to inspect the target. It was at once seen that the target had passed quite unscathed through the ordeal to which it had just been subjected, which was very inconvenient for the officer in charge. None the less, being a stout-hearted fellow and determined not to acknowledge defeat, he explained to his audience that the results had not been altogether of a negative nature. At this a quiet voice was heard inquiring from the back of the spectators: "Are we to assume from what you have said that it is better to have fired and missed than never to have fired at all?" a query which caused great merriment, in which the Demonstrating Officer heartily joined.

Congreve himself was responsible for more than one most useful innovation. It was he who began the system under which members of the Hythe Staff were sent to hold Instructional Courses at large Territorial Centres, thereby saving both officers and men from having to leave their businesses in order to obtain a Musketry Certificate at Hythe.

These Courses did much to increase interest in musketry and machine gunnery throughout the Territorial Army, and they established a very strong link between that force and the school at Hythe.

Congreve was a great believer in the value of miniature rifle shooting and, thanks to his influence and support, properly constructed and covered miniature ranges together with reliable weapons and ammunition became available throughout the Service.

Keenly interested in the Junior Division of the Officers' Training Corps, Congreve gave ready assistance when Mr. Hudson, of *Country Life*, proposed to give a trophy to be shot for annually by the Contingents of the various Public Schools.

Congreve was convinced of the great value of machine

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guns and was a strong advocate of their increase. Here, unfortunately, he was unable to obtain his own way,[1] with the result that the British Army began the Great War with an armament of two machine guns per Battalion as opposed to the sixteen per Battalion which are considered necessary at the present day.

The shortage, indeed, of machine guns was realised at once on the outbreak of hostilities, and early in 1915 Congreve wrote to one of his old Hythe Staff saying: "We are now entitled to a machine gun as our tombstone and to the motto beneath it *Nunc Dimittis*."

That the advice of the Commandant at Hythe in this matter should not have been taken is said in no carping spirit. The fact was that the British nation, since the General Election of 1906, had stood committed to a stringent economy in matters military, and the General Staff were forced to cut their coat according to their cloth. So closely was every proposal to incur new expenditure scrutinised, that authority could not be obtained for the issue of the new tripod M.G. mounting to the Contingents of the Senior Division O.T.C., though the latter were the only source from which a reserve supply of trained machine-gun officers could be obtained. Yet, the old carriage mounting had been employed side by side with the new tripod mounting at Talana Hill in 1899, where the experience gained had demonstrated only too forcibly the utility of the new mounting and the futility of the old.

It was not only in the increase of machine guns that Congreve failed to carry conviction. He was a strong advocate of indirect fire[2] and this one General Officer refused to permit in his command, because as he said, "I don't understand the damned thing." This may have been true enough, but as an argument it was not very convincing.

[1] A similar fate had overtaken the efforts of his two predecessors in the same direction.

[2] Initiated by Colonel Monro and developed by Colonel Egerton.

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The British hatred of change was no doubt responsible for much of the opposition which at this period met all efforts to enlarge the scope of the machine gun's usefulness, which explains the indignation of a prominent gunner who, on seeing an experimental traversing dial on a machine gun, exclaimed: "Why, you people seem to think you can use a machine gun like a piece of artillery."

Congreve, not unnaturally, felt keen disappointment at his failure to secure the adoption of his recommendations in regard to machine guns, but he was the most loyal of men to those whom he served and though it went much against the grain with him he would suppress the enthusiasm of some members of his Staff in their efforts to insist on the supply of more machine guns.

Congreve was an ideal man to work for. Although the strictest of disciplinarians he had the kindest of hearts. His Staff, too, always knew how they stood with him, for he always said what he meant, and meant what he said. He was ever willing to hear all sides of a question and to discuss matters with his subordinates. Having come to a decision, and this he could always be relied upon to do, he would expect complete loyalty of support. In return his subordinates knew well that their Commandant would back them up through thick and thin.

An officer who was brought into the closest personal touch with Congreve at this time writes:

"He suffered very much from acute attacks of asthma, but by sheer force of will he never allowed these attacks to interfere with his work. He insisted on papers being taken to him when unable to leave his bed, and I would often, on these occasions, find him propped up, gasping for breath and hardly able to speak. Yet he would deal with the matters in hand and whisper or note down his instructions. These interviews were most painful, but they were also a wonderful example of his courage and fortitude."

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The same officer records Congreve's hatred of anything in the form of self-advertisement, all his work being done quietly and unostentatiously.

His subordinates, this officer adds, were devoted to him, as well they might be, for apart from the interest which he took in them officially, "he was always ready to give sound advice or sympathy to any of his Staff in private matters, and one could be sure that such advice would be good and helpful." This applied to Officers, Staff-Sergeants, and Civil subordinates alike. No wonder that Hythe in Congreve's day was such a happy family.

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CHAPTER X

A BRIGADIER AT HOME

THE year 1911 was marked by two events of importance to Walter Congreve. In March of that year Billy was gazetted to the Rifle Brigade, while in December Congreve himself was posted to the Command of the 18th Infantry Brigade, the Headquarters of which were at Lichfield, an appointment which suited him admirably, for he was within easy reach of his home at Chartley. None the less, it is probable that of the two occurrences the one that gave him the more pleasure was his boy's entry into the Rifle Brigade.

As an Infantry Brigade Commander under peace conditions Congreve soon made his mark. Writing of him an officer who was very closely associated with him at this time, writes:

"Walter Congreve came straight from Hythe and, as might be supposed, his dominating idea was the effective use of machine guns and the development of the power of the rifle. He was even then a strong advocate of a strong machine-gun unit as an integral part of the Infantry Battalion.

"His prestige and popularity among the Junior Officers and N.C.O.'s of the Battalions were remarkable. I always attributed this to the exceptional energy and interest he showed in the Company Training (he was out continuously with the Companies, all day and every day), and to the fact that he supported and encouraged the very fullest initiative during tactical exercises on the part of the subordinate leaders.

"His views and criticisms were never 'above the heads' of the rank and file—they were all good commonsense of a sort which appealed to them. He set a very

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high standard himself as regards energy and keenness, and expected everyone else to act up to it.

"He retained far more of the characteristics of the first-class Regimental Officer than any other man in his rank and position I have known, and this gave him a great influence over the officers and other ranks in the Battalions. He retained the human 'regimental' touch to an exceptional degree. As a Brigade Commander it was an immense asset."

Early in July 1914 Congreve, in talking to a friend, remarked that he was not likely to achieve anything more important in the Army than the Command of an Infantry Brigade. Little can he have dreamt that within the next ten years he would become a full General and A.D.C. General to the King.

The end of July 1914 found the 18th Infantry Brigade [1] engaged in manœuvres at Llanidloes, the air being full of war rumours, which in the end necessitated a hurried return of the Brigade to Lichfield. The rapid and totally unexpected movement of such a large body of troops threw considerable strain on the local station-master, who, however, rose to the occasion splendidly. It was characteristic of Congreve that, in spite of the turmoil which prevailed on the return of the troops to Lichfield, he immediately wrote with his own hand a letter to the Directors of the Cambrian Railway Company bringing to their notice the excellent work of their station-master. Many officers at such a time of strain would not have thought of doing this at all, while others who might have thought of it would have considered postponement justified, which in this case would have certainly resulted in the letter being left unwritten. Not so Walter Congreve, who never lost a moment in expressing his appreciation of work well done.

Congreve's Diary of the Great War begins with the

[1] The 18th Infantry Brigade formed part of the 6th Division.

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following entry: "*August 4th.*—Ordered to mobilise." [1]

At the opening of the Great War Congreve was fifty-two [2] years of age. Six feet in height, his tall, wiry, active figure, and his hair almost untouched by grey, gave him the appearance of a much younger man. Gifted with a very marked natural aptitude for command and blessed with an iron self-control, he combined a wide knowledge of the world, a keen judgment of men, and many interests outside his profession with a mind capable of rapidly assimilating new ideas, a trait of very great value in a war in which Science, with its all-pervading influence, was to play so prodigious a part. It is true that he was a martyr to asthma, and that asthma and the raw, damp cold of a Flanders winter were likely to go ill together, but a disability which might have proved an insurmountable obstacle to one of a less resolute character was regarded as just another enemy, to be grappled with and thrust aside, by this lion-hearted man.

Mobilisation was fated not to proceed without a hitch, as the following entries will show:

"*August 5th.*—Most of day in barracks, men began to come in. Returned to Chartley.

"*August 6th.*—Ditto.

"*August 7th.*—Men all in, horses issued. At 9 p.m. got orders to entrain at once for Edinburgh. No harness issued and much not arrived. So confusion was great. I myself was at Chartley, and was fetched by one of D.L.I. We left Lichfield at 1 a.m. and arrived at Edinburgh at 9 a.m. next day."

The 18th Infantry Brigade had been despatched to Scotland in consequence of rumours of an impending

[1] The 18th Infantry Brigade consisted of 1st West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st East Yorkshire Regiment, 2nd Notts and Derby Regiment, 2nd Durham Light Infantry, and the usual ancillary Services.

[2] The age of Infantry Brigade Commanders was soon to be much reduced. Lieutenant-Colonel F. H. Burnell Nugent, of the Rifle Brigade, obtained this position at the age of thirty-five in the spring of 1916, while before the end of the War an Infantry Brigade Commander of twenty-five was not unknown.

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hostile raid, and the three following days were occupied by Congreve and his Staff in viewing the country over which they might be called upon to operate.

The Diary entry for August 11th, 12th and 13th is: "Busy getting together and repairing ruin caused by our premature start on third day of mobilisation." Nor was Congreve's Brigade the only unit affected by the fear of raids, for the 10th Infantry Brigade,[1] stationed at Shorncliffe, was ordered to York. This would not sound a very difficult movement, but none the less only the Brigade Headquarters, together with two Battalions and two half Battalions, arrived safely at York, two half Battalions of different Regiments having been shunted in error on the G.E.R. system, to wake up after a night's journey to find themselves at Cromer![2] They did not rejoin their Brigade at York till the 9th, and as their services had not been required in the interval no harm was done, but it is easy to conceive the circumstances in which the absence of two half Battalions would have been a very serious matter.

Yet the mobilisation scheme of 1914 in its minutiæ of detail was a masterpiece of military prevision, while the reputation of British railways stands second to none the whole world over. Yet, in spite of all, no sooner had mobilisation been ordered than the military machine began to emit ominous creaks, so vast a difference is there between devising a scheme and carrying the same scheme out. The net result of the raid scares was that instead of all six regular Divisions crossing the Channel, two of them, the 4th and 6th, were temporarily retained at home, and in accordance with this change of plan the 6th Division under Major-General J. L. Keir was ordered to concentrate at Cambridge, for which Congreve and his Brigade entrained at Edinburgh on August 14th.

[1] Of the 4th Division.

[2] *A Brigade of the Old Army*, by Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Haldane, K.C.B., D.S.O., p. 1.

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In connection with this journey a member of Congreve's Staff writes of his General:

"Care for his men, in the true regimental spirit, was often particularly noticeable when circumstances were unusual. In August 1914 when moving from Edinburgh to Cambridge for the concentration of the 6th Division the journey was done by night. Shortly before arriving at Newcastle he announced that the men (of the Headquarters 18th Infantry Brigade) must have something more than their very dull haversack ration before the end of the long journey. This created a problem of some difficulty to his Staff, and it was being discussed when the train arrived at Newcastle. The General immediately got out and said he would try to fix it up himself. He routed out some official (it was the middle of the night), with the result that when we rolled into York we were welcomed with a small fleet of platform waggons laden with hot coffee and sandwiches. I never heard who paid for this; I suspect strongly that the General did; I cannot imagine an auditor of Army accounts ever submitting to anything so irregular."

There can be no question but that Congreve did pay the bill on this occasion, and it cannot have been a very small sum either, for the strength of Brigade Headquarters was fifty-two of all ranks. Yet he was far from being a rich man, though ever a most generous one.

The 18th Infantry Brigade rejoined the 6th Division on August 15th. Cambridge, even in those early days of the War, present a busy scene, for the streets were crowded with past Cambridge men who flocked back to their old University to register their names for service. The hall of Corpus Christi College was a centre of great activity. At the top of the hall, at the High Table, sat a committee of three under the presidency of Mr. Walter Durnford,[1] which laboured all day long and far into the night interviewing applicants for commissions. In the

[1] The late Sir Walter Durnford, G.B.E.

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body of the hall forty-eight Senior Members of the University—many of them men bearing names famous far beyond the confines of Cambridge—battled in two-hour reliefs with the daily avalanche of letters. At a table by the door sat a quiet, unassuming looking figure in charge of the Central Registry. Yet there were many who knew that this unostentatious man was not unfamiliar with the conduct of great affairs, for he was Mr. W. P. Schreiner, formerly Premier at the Cape. That one so distinguished should have been content with a task so humble was typical of Cambridge in those critical days, the aim of all being to render help in some guise, no matter how trivial the work assigned might appear to be.

From Cambridge the 6th Division received a warm welcome, as the following Diary entries show:

"*August 5th.*—Arrived at 3 a.m. and camped on Midsummer Common. Officers of D.L.I. and ourselves (Headquarters) lived in Jesus College, and I had the room of Sir A. Quiller-Couch, Professor of English Literature, and very comfortable.

"*August 16th to September 7th.*—Camped in Cambridge. Rest of Division concentrated there. All people most kind to us in every possible way. Mr. Gray,[1] Master of Jesus, and Mr. Duckworth[2] did everything possible for us and kept open house for us. Dr. Parry,[3] of Trinity, and Dr. Shipley,[4] Master of Christ's, asked me to dine and showed me their Colleges. People sent things to the men and served them with things in camp below cost price."

The officers of all the other units of the Division were looked after as in the case of the D.L.I. and Brigade Headquarters, for each College welcomed some unit or other, the 3rd Rifle Brigade, in which Billy Congreve

[1] Mr. A. Gray, M.A. [2] Dr. W. L. H. Duckworth, M.D., Sc.D.
[3] Rev. R. St. John Parry, D.D., Vice-Master of Trinity College.
[4] The late Sir Arthur Shipley, G.B.E., M.D., F.R.S.

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was serving, gratefully accepting the invitation of Dr. Anderson [1] and the Fellows of Gonville and Caius College.

Thus three weeks passed, and the weather being most favourable throughout, much training was done though, as Congreve wrote: "We wearied of our enforced inaction when our army oversea was gaining so much glory in the fights from Mons to Paris." [2]

Mrs. Congreve had volunteered for service with a Red Cross Hospital about to be sent to Belgium, so she came down to Cambridge to "say good-bye, and brought Christopher, who stayed on with Billy in camp at Newmarket, where his Brigade moved about the 24th. The boys came over for Sunday and we spent it on the river."

The weary period of inaction came to an end at last, and Congreve writes:

"*September 7th, Monday.*—Marched to Newmarket. Left Newmarket 9 p.m."

"*September 8th.*—Arrived at Southampton at 3 a.m. and embarked on board Transport *Georgian,* a dirty old beast built twenty-five years ago for cattle trade in North Atlantic and with no accommodation for passengers at all."

German prisoners were at this time a novelty in England, and the few which had just arrived at Southampton were considered worthy of a visit, though it must be confessed that the officer prisoner proved to be but a sorry representative of the most formidable people with whom the British Empire has ever crossed swords. Congreve writes as follows:

"Breakfasted at hotel, and saw Billy, who took me to see some captured Uhlans, eight dirty youths clad in grey-green with brown leather long boots and leather seats to

[1] The late Sir Hugh Anderson, M.D., F.R.S.

[2] The 4th Division had been released from home service and had arrived to play a notable part at Le Cateau.

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their breeches. Their officer, a Dragoon, captured owing to his horse falling on him, said he had no desire for the war, and expected Germany to be beaten six weeks from now. If it is a real unconditional defeat I pray it may be so, but nothing less. Sailed at noon."

The weather, which since the declaration of war had been superb, now changed to rain, and the Diary entry concludes with " some rain, sea smooth."

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CHAPTER XI

A BRIGADIER IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

THE following day the 18th Infantry Brigade reached St. Nazaire, a port very recently opened up as the British Base in place of Boulogne and Havre, which had been vacated owing to the advance of the German Army. Congreve's Brigade did not disembark till September 12th, on which date they landed and entrained for Coulommiers mid scenes of great enthusiasm, as Congreve records in his Diary:

"French people all along most kind, giving fruit, flowers, bread, meat, tea, coffee and souvenirs of all kinds to the men, who gave away their badges and buttons in exchange and decorated their hats with flowers and miniature flags until we looked like a party of bean-feasters rather than soldiers."

The reference to souvenirs reminds one of the extraordinary scenes which took place in France in the early days of mobilisation in 1870. There was a most lamentable lack of system, and units arrived at their entraining stations at all hours. The first Regiment to leave Paris on July 16th, 1870, arrived at the station at 2 p.m. for a train due to start at 5.45 p.m. An immense number of admirers accompanied the troops to the station, shouting "à Berlin," and windy patriotism being thirsty work, and there being much time to spare, the troops and their admirers betook themselves to the nearest cafés, where both parties rapidly arrived at that state of mind which views the future with optimism and the past with indifference. The subsequent entrainment provided, in consequence, a scene not lacking in animation, to which

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the officers themselves added a bright touch by refusing to concern themselves with such unworthy tasks as getting their men into the train, asserting that this was the province of the railway officials and not of themselves.

To complete the picture, it only remains to be said that to their evident patriotism, the civilian admirers added a nice taste for souvenirs, in which they indulged so freely that the troops, when their entrainment was at last completed, were found to have been relieved not only of their ammunition, but of every article of their equipment that could with decency be detached from their persons.

In general, the utmost confusion prevailed. Officers were separated from their men and men from their officers. No one knew where to go.

One Brigadier telegraphed to Paris on July 21st, "Have arrived at Belfort. Not found my Brigade. Not found General of Division. Don't know where my Regiments are. What should I do?"[1] What indeed!

Happy it was for all concerned in 1914 that the science of mobilisation had advanced with such giant strides during the past forty years.

The 18th Infantry Brigade detrained at Coulommiers, at 1 a.m. on the 14th, the remainder of the journey to the front being carried out on foot. At the end of the first day's march Congreve came across traces of his brother, a curious coincidence.

"*September 14th.*—Billeted in quite a good house. On a door I found chalked 'Captain Congreve,'[2] so Francis has evidently been here."

The weather continued to be very wet, and it was seldom possible to get the whole Brigade under cover. The Diary entry for September 18th runs:

[1] For these and many other illuminating instances of mismanagement, see Mr. Edwin A. Pratt's *The Rise of Rail Power in War and Conquest* 1833–1914, pp. 140 *et seq.* (P. S. King & Son, Winchester).

[2] Now Lieutenant-Colonel F. L. Congreve, D.S.O., M.C.

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"Got one Battalion into Dhuizel, ourselves (Brigade Headquarters) into the church and a farm, where Major Burns-Lindow,[1] of the Irish Horse, most hospitably fed us and bedded us. Three Battalions bivouacked and it poured all night." An unpleasant foretaste of the hardships which were to come.

The 18th Infantry Brigade, with the remainder of the 6th Division, had now arrived in rear of the right flank of the British Army on the Aisne. To put it briefly, the situation was as follows: The British Army had crossed the Aisne and had established itself on the northern bank of that river. The enemy had made desperate attempts to throw their assailants back across the river, but without success, in spite of the fact that a hundred or more German Battalions[2] were faced by only seventy-eight British Battalions, in spite, too, of the further fact that the German Infantry were supported by the fire of powerful Siege Artillery, to which the British had no means of replying.

A state of deadlock now existed on the Aisne, neither side being able to make any further progress, a condition of affairs obtaining along the whole front to the south-east until the flanks of both Germans and French rested on the Swiss frontier, which it was politic for both sides to respect. In the west, however, the flanks of the belligerents were in the air, and there had already begun those efforts, both on the French and German side, to outflank their opponents which led to an ever-increasing extension of front and to an ever-increasing menace to the security of the Channel ports, a menace which was soon to bring about the transfer of the British Army from the Aisne to Flanders. The extension of the German front westwards and northwards, involving as it did the transfer of troops from elsewhere, including from the

[1] Major I. W. Burns-Lindow, of the South Irish Horse.

[2] *Official History France and Flanders, August to October* 1914, p. 409.

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Aisne front, necessitated constant attacks of a more or less serious nature on the British and French to prevent the Allies from withdrawing troops to meet the danger in the north-west.

In view of the very heavy fighting which had recently taken place, the arrival of the 6th Division was welcomed as an opportunity for resting units upon which a specially heavy strain had been thrown. To this end the 6th Division was, for the moment, broken up, and its units placed at the disposal of other Divisional Generals, the 18th Infantry Brigade being attached to the 1st Division and ordered to relieve in their trenches the 1st (Guards) and the 2nd Infantry Brigades.

Trenches, in those days, were very different affairs from those to which the British Army became accustomed later on in the war. On the Aisne there were no communication trenches, while the front-line defences were very far from being continuous, and their design afforded scant protection against heavy shell fire. They were provided too with little or no wire, for of this all-important material there only existed such stocks as the two [1] R.E. Companies in each Division carried with them supplemented by such wire as was obtainable in neighbouring fields.

Congreve's Diary records the entry of his Brigade into the struggle:

"*September 19th.*—Got up to torrents of rain, which continued till eight, when we crossed the river Aisne on a pontoon bridge and entered the village of Bourg. Found Monro's [2] Headquarters there and he gave me breakfast. Then on by motor to see General Lomax,[3] who commands 1st Division and who is bivouacked under a tree. Shells seem to be whistling in every direction.

[1] At this time there were only two R.E. Companies per Division.

[2] The late General Sir C. Monro, Bart., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.S.I.

[3] Major-General S. H. Lomax, died of wounds received on October 31st, 1914.

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I was to go to a village called Troyon and relieve Generals Bulfin [1] and Maxse [2] in our front trenches. Rode up and went with them over the position, which is an extended and awkward one. At 4 p.m. took over from Bulfin and got two Battalions in place. Others could not get into the trenches until after dark owing to shell fire, and it was an all-night job getting them in. I am ordered to stay here until the end. Made a shelter under a bank and slept there, such sleep as there was."

A restless night was followed by an early start on the following morning. Congreve's introduction to the Great War was to be marked by a day of desperate fighting, as desperate possibly as any which he met with during his command of the 18th Infantry Brigade.

"*September 20th, Sunday.*—Started round our outposts, or trenches I should say, at 4 a.m. East Yorks on our left connect with 3rd Brigade (Gloucesters) and have a fairly safe line, though in one place the field of fire is no more than 100 yards. Next to them D.L.I., whose left is very close to enemy's trenches on other side of crest. We hear them talking plainly. Next comes West Yorks, and they hold all along the Chemin des Dames and connect with the French.[3] When I got to them there was some sniping going on, and as I moved over to their right rear it increased."

Having found the O.C. 1st West Yorks, Congreve learnt that the day had already been not without incident. Soon after dawn the Germans had attacked the Moroccans—immediately on the right of the British line—and had driven them back. The O.C. West Yorkshire Regiment, which was the right Battalion of the British Army, thereupon had sent out a Company to cover his exposed flank. The Moroccans had soon rallied, and had come forward again, when, not knowing what had happened,

[1] Now General Sir E. S. Bulfin, K.C.B., C.V.O.
[2] Now General Sir Ivor Maxse, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O.
[3] The 2nd Sherwood Foresters were in Brigade Reserve at Troyon.

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they had fired into this Company of the West Yorks, inflicting some thirty casualties. The line had then settled down again under heavy fire from German artillery and rifles.[1]

Congreve, having instructed the O.C. West Yorks to inform the G.O.C. 2nd Cavalry Brigade at Paissy of the situation, returned to his Headquarters, which he reached at 9 a.m. He found his Staff somewhat perturbed at his absence, with reference to which a member of his Staff writes:

"On the Aisne in 1914, in the dawn of trench warfare, when the Brigade had been only two days in the front line, we discovered very early in the morning that the Brigadier was missing. On making enquiries the Signal Sergeant reported that the General had set out with an orderly and left a message saying that he was going to walk along the front line to see how they were getting on. Anyone who remembers what trenches were like in those days will know that a walk along the fighting line was far from a healthy occupation. On his return we went as near as we could to reproaching him for going alone, but his reply was that he knew that we required rest, that he felt fresh, and he wanted to see things for himself."

The enemy made a second attack between 10 and 11 a.m. which was immediately checked by the West Yorks. After this, first one crisis and then another arose. The Moroccans, attacked anew during a heavy storm of rain, once again fell back, and the enemy pouring into the gap brought to bear a most destructive enfilade fire upon the West Yorks, which caused very heavy casualties. The enemy then sent forward a party with a white flag which caused someone, who will now never be known, to tell our men to cease fire. The enemy exploited the advantage thus gained and inflicted still heavier casualties on the

[1] *Official History France and Belgium, August to October* 1914, p. 389.

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West Yorks. The situation became worse and worse, and the Brigadier himself felt called upon to intervene.

"I got," he writes, "the Sherwoods fallen in and attacked, but suffered a good deal from two machine guns brought up on our right and on our left fronts, the latter especially deadly. I myself saw two sections mowed off like corn; every man collapsed like a sack. Eventually Sherwoods, helped by Cavalry [1] from Paissy on our right rear, reoccupied the trenches. But meanwhile D.L.I. had been attacked, and though they repulsed it, someone ill-advisedly initiated a counter-attack which took the East Yorks with it, and directly they came over the crest they were blown to bits by guns and machine guns, and I lost a lot of good officers. Another party after this, seized by an order(?) to retire, left their trench, and I had some difficulty in getting them back. So passed our afternoon, and I never want such a Sunday again. All worked well, and no one lost his head, but had the Germans made a real determined attack I don't know how I should have stayed, for my line, like that of our whole Army, is far too extended. A very anxious night of constant alarms and some rain."

If the Brigade Commander had reason to be pleased with his troops, the latter had every reason to be satisfied with their Brigadier, for throughout the day he had shown himself calm, resolute, a first-class fighting man.

There followed four days of many alarms and ceaseless shell fire which claimed its fifty or so victims every day. Then came a most welcome relief.

"*September 25th.*—Bulfin came to relieve us, and we got away about 11 p.m. and to billets at Pargnan about 1 a.m. for a few days' rest. In nice house, but I was no sooner in bed than Maria [2] started to shell the village and kept hard at it all night, so that sleep was impossible, for though, thanks to the steepness of the slope, she seldom got into the houses, she put her shells so close that the concussion shook the whole place to pieces."

[1] The 2nd Cavalry Brigade. [2] The German 14-in. Howitzer.

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Congreve took the opportunity to write a long letter to his wife:

"Black Maria's shells weigh 280 lb.,[1] and are thrown from miles back so that we cannot reach the guns, having nothing big enough up at present. The German gunners are A1, and must have a most perfect system of observation by outlooks and spies. There is this great gun, for instance, which is miles away and yet is able to follow a Battery or a Column as though it could see it. They have besides this several other big guns, all of which we know from their shells. Next to Maria are some smaller of the same kind and called Coal-boxes. Then there are the high-explosive shrapnel which burst with a terrifying 'wough, wough, wough,' and emit a dense cloud of greenish-white smoke, and finally there are the ordinary shrapnel, which burst in the air and scatter bullets of different sizes and velocities. We get an enormous quantity of all and every kind. For the five days I have been out in front we have had all these roaring, whistling and rushing over our heads and bursting near us, and in addition our own shells doing the same roaring, whistling and screaming as they pass over against the enemy. The result was a perfect inferno of noise, and I feel glad to be a little farther off it, but I am still getting more than my share of Black Maria, who seems to have known of my march here last night, for within an hour of my arrival she began shelling this village and she has never stopped since more than half an hour at a time."

Distracting as was "the inferno of noise" on the Aisne, it must have appeared small enough to those who were called upon to endure the vastly greater inferno of later years. In illustration of this particular point the table given herewith may be of interest. It shows the number of guns maintained by the British on two separate dates during the Great War:

[1] Later on in the war the British 15-in. Howitzer was firing a shell weighing 1,475 lb., or rather more than half a ton, while at the end of the war a still more formidable Howitzer of 18-in. calibre was under construction.

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1st Division Front, September 20th, 1914	Second Army Front, September 12th, 1917
18-Pounders	
1 gun per 162 yards	1 gun per 9 yards
4.5-in. Howitzers	
1 Howitzer per 488 yards	1 Howitzer per 27 yards
60-Pounders	
1 gun per 2,200 yards	1 gun per 68 yards
6-in. Howitzers	
Nil [1]	1 Howitzer per 25 yards
8-in. Howitzers	
Nil	1 Howitzer per 76 yards
9.2-in. Howitzers	
Nil	1 Howitzer per 85 yards
12-in. Howitzers	
Nil	1 Howitzer per 377 yards

To complete the comparison it is only necessary to point out that while the spectre of ammunition shortage had already appeared on the Aisne, the only limit to the rate of gun-fire in 1917 lay in the physical capacity of gun-crews to load and fire their weapons.

To return to Congreve's letter to his wife of September 25th:

"For the last week I have sat on a ridge above a ravine and lived in a hole hollowed out of a bank lined with straw and covered in with a waggon cover, and have never slept better when, that is, I was able to sleep at all, which is seldom more than an hour at a time, about four hours in the twenty-four."

The courage shown by the women of France, and in particular the elder ones, in carrying on their work under

[1] A Brigade of old-pattern 6-in. Howitzers arrived at the Front on September 23rd, 1914. *Official History, France and Flanders, August to October* 1914, p. 381.

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the most dangerous conditions during the Great War is proverbial, and in this connection Congreve writes:

"Just below my cave was a small village in which I used to do my daily washing and occasionally feed. One morning the old woman who lived there, a dear old thing, came and shook hands with me and wished me God-speed. Ten minutes after, a Black Maria fragment killed her as she was standing by her fire. I somehow felt more sorry than for the loss of all the friends I had had the day before, for it seemed so unjust. People who can still want war after seeing this must be little short of devils, but you are probably seeing as much of it as I am. I have had no letter from you since I have left England.[1]

"Marching one night through a town on my way up here, Hammy [2] came out to see me, took me in and hospitably entertained me. He has applied to have Bill as A.D.C. and has, I hear from my General, got him. I hope he will suit the place, for it is not an easy one."

It only remains to be said that the new A.D.C. rapidly made his mark, the first step forward in the all too brief career of this most remarkable young man.

The 18th Infantry Brigade was fated to enjoy a very brief rest, for on the following day the Diary entry runs as follows:

"*September 26th.*—Orders came at six to send off a Battalion to support our old place, and to us at noon to move out to do ditto. Bivouacked in a field under a wood with nothing. So much for our rest!"

No fighting of particular interest occurred during the remainder of the stay of the 18th Infantry Brigade on the Aisne. For the troops there was continuous hard digging in an effort to improve their trenches and a daily toll of some fifty killed and wounded, while for Congreve

[1] Mrs. Congreve was present with a Red Cross Ambulance during the bombardment of Antwerp.

[2] Major-General Hubert Hamilton, Commander of the 3rd Division, killed in action October 14th, 1914.

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there was the daily walk round the trenches every morning and every evening. A tour of the trenches at this time was a particularly hazardous proceeding, for as has been already noted, the trenches were not continuous, being "usually a succession of pits capable of holding a few men. Generally, they were of a narrow type, eighteen inches to two feet wide, with tiny traverses three to six feet wide." [1]

Anyone passing along the front line would therefore be fully exposed throughout, for with such narrow trenches it was most difficult for one man to pass another. This meant that anyone visiting the trenches would, as a general rule, be obliged to walk along outside them in the open.

Among the few MSS. left by Walter Congreve is a half sheet of foolscap, containing a number of notes for a lecture delivered by him in 1918, when commanding the VII Corps, to the officers attending a course of instruction at the Corps School. What Congreve said in this lecture, or talk as he would have preferred to describe it, must have carried great weight with his audience, for it was obvious to them that the speaker practised what he preached.

"Be with your men," he said, "in dangerous times and uncomfortable times, and in these especially be always cheery and optimistic. Stop all croaking and criticism, and do not offend in this way yourself. It means nothing, and is a British failing, but it is harmful and must be stopped."

In these matters Congreve set a very notable example, for the greater the danger, the worse the weather, the more certain it was that the troops holding the line would see the tall, active figure of "Old Concrete," as they came to style their General, who had come up to share

[1] *Official History of France and Flanders, August to October* 1914, p. 378.

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their dangers and discomforts with them. None too would hear him "croaking and criticising," for he was the most loyal of subordinates, and whatever doubts he may have felt as to the wisdom of those set over him, he kept such doubts to himself. The pleasant word too that he had for everyone, and his cheerful confident bearing and complete indifference to danger, had a most reassuring influence on all ranks.

Congreve notes from time to time any churches the architecture of which interested him.

"*September 29th.*—Moulins is a very pretty little village of limestone and evidently very old. Its church is fine, a gable tower and vaulted roof. Its bells built in the walls of the street are very quaint. It would give an artist much satisfaction, but its streets are oriental in their narrowness and quite so in their disregard of sanitation."

The church at St. Remy appealed to him very much: "Near-by is a fine Gothic church with a tall square tower, on the top of which is a Wren cupola and at its side a small round tower like those in Ireland."

The time had nearly arrived for the beginning of the movement which was to take the British Army from the Aisne to Flanders. Before quitting the Aisne, however, Congreve records one incident which shows his possession of a most valuable trait in any soldier, namely, the capacity to go to sleep at any time in any place.

"*September 30th.*—Splendid weather again. Out a.m. and p.m. round my trenches. Wallace [1] and I came in for a French *v.* German battle at dusk, a very common occurrence. Every sort of arm engaged, but nothing done. I don't myself believe that a man on either side moved. I was crammed into a trench with four French privates and went to sleep!"

[1] Captain R. F. H. Wallace, the Black Watch, Brigade-Major 18th Infantry Brigade.

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Before leaving the Aisne the 18th Infantry Brigade returned to the 6th Division. "Our time," wrote Congreve, "with the 1st Division cost me 51 officers and 1,000 men."

The extent of these losses can be better realised if one remembers that they fell entirely upon the highly trained personnel of pre-war days who were absolutely irreplaceable.

The last Sunday on the Aisne was October 4th, and for the first time since leaving England Congreve was able to go to church, a proof of the strenuous life he had been leading, for he never failed to attend a service on a Sunday if it was humanly possible to do so. On this day he got news for the first time from his wife, about whom he was, as his Diary shows, very anxious.

"Letters from Celia in Antwerp, and very busy, of 15th and 23rd, and from Geoff of 25th saying he is appointed to *Benbow,* a new battleship which my mother described as having ten 12-pounder guns!" Old ladies found it somewhat hard to keep pace with Naval and Military technicalities during the Great War, and later on Walter Congreve had to explain to his mother that the impartiality with which she addressed his letters, now to the VII Corps, now to the 7th Division, was apt to cause considerable delay in their receipt.

As the war went on the misdirection of letters was not the only difficulty with which the Director of the Army Postal Service had to contend.

"The public conceived an extraordinary habit of addressing units only by their initials. It was easy to recognise units under such familiar abbreviations as H.L.I., or K.O.S.B., but it required a peculiar type of specialised knowledge to grasp that D.C.D. stood for the 'Dripping Collecting Depôt,' or that F.E.P. was the sister service, or 'Fat Elimination Plant.'

"Nor were cryptic initials the only mystery to be solved, for correspondents, filled with an intense pride in their

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knowledge of the nomenclature of Regiments, called Corps by their nicknames, and sorters found themselves confronted with the problems of locating such units as 'Forty Thieves,' the 'Holy Boys,' the 'Dirty Shirts' or the 'Little Black Devils,' etc., etc."

Yet, in spite of incorrect and eccentric methods of address, it was very rare for an addressee to fail to receive his letters, so efficient was the postal service in the field during the Great War. This extreme efficiency will, perhaps, be better appreciated when it is said that by 1918 no less than twelve and a half million letters a week were being despatched from London to the various fronts on which British Armies were engaged.[1]

Now and again Congreve refers to his Mess arrangements: "A great dinner last night of claret, chickens, sausages and stewed pears, mostly due to the efforts of our interpreter, Burgoin, a good fellow and a gentleman." Congreve's taste in food was extraordinarily simple, in which connection one of his Staff writes:

"He was content with a very unpretentious Mess, which I had reason to be thankful for, as I was responsible for the messing. He had at least one weakness, however, and that was a taste for special sausages generally known as white- or black-puddings, according to the colour of their complexion. His mother sent them out to him from time to time, and some of us, when seeing him eating these after their journey through the field post, looked upon it as yet another example of his fearless nature!"

On October 6th the move to Flanders began. The entry for that day is:

"Burgoin, who had gone into Soissons to see his brother serving in a regiment there, found he had been killed two days before, and very sad in consequence. A

[1] Authorities: (1) Lecture, by Brigadier-General W. Price, C.B., C.M.G., C.B.E., at Edinburgh Academy on July 15th, 1920; (2) an article entitled "The Black Box," by John Pym, published in the *Daily Mail* of September 22nd, 1918; (3) *The Post Annual*, Christmas 1921.

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damp, sad day too." However, there is generally a bright spot even on a depressing day, and the entry for this day ends on a happier note. "Marched at 7 p.m. to St. Remy. Arrived at 12.30. Bed at 2 a.m. in one lately occupied by General von Kluck who commands the German Right Army, and a very good bed too!"

The march was continued on October 7th, and the Diary entry for that day records the return of an old enemy, who was to be all the more troublesome as the weather grew colder and wetter.

"Letters from Celia of September 23rd and 29th. Busy with wounded and full of admiration of Belgian soldiers' cleanliness, bravery and cheerfulness. . . . Got to bed at 10 p.m. Rather asthmatic."

The weather had lately taken a turn for the better.

"*October 9th.*—Lovely day. We are much blest in our weather. . . . After many changes in our orders we marched to Maux Station and entrained there."

"*October 10th.*—Awoke to find ourselves at Etaples at 5.30 a.m. Made me feel a little homesick to see the English Channel again."

There follows in this day's Diary entry a reference to a most charming incident:

"I had sent," Congreve writes, "my watch to Paris for repair, and got it back mended with a card 'General, I wish you Good Luck. From an old veteran of 1870. E. BREKART. No charge for the main-spring.' I wrote him my thanks for a very pretty action," and one too which no man would have appreciated more fully than Walter Congreve.

The next entry in the Diary reveals the existence of an ascetic strain in Congreve's character, a strain which had made itself very apparent in the case of his Uncle George, who had become, as the reader will remember, a Cowley Father, and in the case of an aunt and sister, who had become Anglican Nuns.

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"*October* 11*th.*—Waked at one with orders to march at 7.30 to Wardrecques. Stayed in a clergy house exactly like Cowley in all ways and felt much at home. Its cells, plain cleanliness and silence in corridors, garden, chapel, refectory, all like the Mission House. Its priest is a gentleman and is good to look at. Church in village commencing at ten, so attended. Could not understand a word, but its chants are those of Cowley, and I felt very full of our three 'Religious'[1] and wrote to them after. Slept in a cell and enjoyed being in one again. Anxious about Celia, for I hear Antwerp has fallen.[2] Fine but colder and damp."

The entry for the following day records the introduction of the 18th Infantry Brigade to a novel form of transport, which was to become a commonplace before the end of the war.

"*October* 12*th.*—At 10.30 p.m. last night ordered to be ready at 8 a.m. to be transported by motors to Hazebrouck, so sat on roadside from that hour until 12.30, when 200 motor-vans and lorries, part of the French train, came up and took us and the whole Brigade to Hazebrouck, where we stayed the night."

The general situation was as follows: the British Army having begun to arrive in Flanders from the Aisne, was now about to assist the French in the effort to outflank and to envelop the German right wing. At British G.H.Q. the outcome of the operations was viewed with much optimism. Little was it supposed that the enemy were at that moment completing their arrangements for

[1] His uncle, aunt and sister.

[2] Mrs. Congreve left Antwerp with one of the last omnibus-loads of wounded to leave the city. It was a London omnibus with a big advertisement of Mr. Cyril Maude's latest play on it, and was full of badly wounded men. During the war Mrs. Congreve received from the French Government first the Réconnaissance Française and later (for her services during the bombardment of Rosières-aux-Salines in 1918) the Croix de Guerre. For her services in Antwerp she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Medal by the King of the Belgians.

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the launching of an onslaught the like of which had never yet been seen in war.

The Diary entries for the next ten days or so will be quoted almost verbatim, for they deal with a war of movement which was not to be met with again till 1918. The Diary, too, gives us a wonderful picture of the hopes and fears, the reports true and false, and the strain, both physical and mental, which an Infantry Brigadier was called upon to battle with during an advance in which he was never out of touch with an enemy, in whose presence a slip could not be made with impunity.

"*October 13th.*—Marched at 7 a.m. to Neuf Berquin, which was shelled by Germans. Relieved the Bays there, and held it until about 2 p.m., when ordered to attack and take a line Les Trois Fermes-Ht. Marsin-Bleu. French Cavalry on my right, but no other troops for miles. Attacked invisible Germans over very close country and had 120 casualties before dark, under which Germans retired. Much rain. Country all round lit by blazing farms and church shelled all day. Walked round lines in dark and mud. An anxious day. Stayed in a good house again, but did not get to bed until midnight."

After a bare four hours in bed, Congreve was up and about again:

"*October 14th.*—Up at 4.30 a.m. Ordered to march at two as flank guard to Division and moving on La Verrier. Opposed all the way by snipers and machine guns. W. Yorks on edge of dark brought up by Germans in La Verrier. Put out outposts and got into a very dirty farm of kind people, who insisted I should take their bed, which I did with anxiety but unnecessary, for I slept well from eleven to four bar a few wakenings. Wet off and on all day and much mud. Letter from Celia of 29th September.

"*October 15th.*—Marched at 1.30 to Steenwerck and unopposed, a short distance. Much waiting on road for orders. Constant visits from the French each day. Letter

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from Celia of October 5th, the bombardment pending and wounded pouring in."

The following day was to be one of information both reassuring and alarming, bringing home in vivid fashion the difficulties with which a Commander is faced during a war of movement. One can picture the incident of the French Sergeant of Cuirassiers. The Brigadier and his small Staff seated in the dimly lit café littered with broken china and glass left by the enemy in his retreat, the cheerless, fuelless stove, the pitch-darkness of the street outside relieved only by a faint beam of light from the café window glistening on the wet cobble-stones; silence complete save for the ceaseless drip, drip of the rain falling from the eaves and the faint throbbing of distant guns. Then the ringing sound of horse-hoofs striking on the *pavée,* the shouts of the rider inquiring the way, the clatter as he pulls up at the door of the café, and the rattle as he dismounts. The door is thrown open violently, and in bursts the Sergeant of Cuirassiers. No gleaming figure this in burnished steel such as Meissonier would have loved to depict, but a soldier wet, mud-bespattered and war-worn, his horse-hair crest hanging damp and limp, his helmet, cuirass and spurs freckled with countless rusty raindrops; he himself excited, voluble, gesticulating, in marked contrast to the placid, composed Englishman who, whatever his anxieties, maintained a complete outward calm.

"*October 16th.*—I heard my dear friend Hammy was killed yesterday. Wonder if his successor will keep on Billy as A.D.C. At 5 p.m. Furse[1] our C.S.O. came down to tell me I was with Doran[2] on my left to cross the river and occupy Sailly, the bridge reported destroyed and to be mended by R.E. Pitch-dark before we could even get orders out, so no reconnaissance could be car-

[1] Now Lieutenant-General Sir W. T. Furse, K.C.B., D.S.O.

[2] Brigadier-General W. R. B. Doran, C.B., D.S.O., commanding 17th Infantry Brigade.

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ried out, and it looked a very nasty job. Started off at seven and when half-way, about two miles, heard French had been in it since 5 p.m.! Pushed a Battalion on followed by another, and after they had completely vanished into pitchy darkness, an excited French Sergeant of Cuirassiers rushed into the café we were waiting in to say the Germans had recaptured the town at the point of the bayonet and French were all out of it! Job assumed even worse aspects. An hour after, a message from Leveson-Gower [1] per Wallace that he was in the place and not a German there! Walked down with Maughan [2] by light of blazing church and went all round. River a big one and bridge only partly destroyed and still passable for Infantry. To bed on café floor where we were and thick on ground, French and English together, at 1 a.m."

Three hours later Congreve was about again.

"*October 16th.*—Up at four and marched to occupy line outside the town at 2.30 p.m. Had Germans really held the place our losses would have been very serious and we could not have crossed. Seedy all day with bronchitis, to bed early and dinnerless.

"*October 17th.*—Marched at 7.30, and eventually arrived at Bois Grenier, about six miles. Ordered to advance parallel to Doran, 17th Brigade, and occupy a line. Did so and met slight opposition all along it. Put out outposts and got to bed about ten. Orders arrived at 3.40 a.m., which meant getting up to write ours, and so not worth going to bed again as breakfast was at 4.30.

The following day was one of very hard fighting, and on the part of the 18th Infantry Brigade one of fine achievement. The evening, however, found Congreve's Brigade in a very isolated position which its Commander appears to have taken very calmly.

"*October 18th.*—To march in two columns east towards Lille and find and ascertain strength of enemy.

[1] Now Brigadier-General P. Leveson-Gower, C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] Now Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel F. G. Maughan, D.S.O.

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Did so and came in for a severe fight, which eventually left me in possession of Ennetières and west end of Erquingheim, and far ahead of Brigades on my left and right. Took up outposts on it and went to see Divisional Headquarters, who gave me dinner. Letter from Celia sent out of Antwerp by aeroplane after bombardment had commenced. To bed at one at Fètus."

A bare four and a half hours' rest and Congreve was on the move again:

"*October 19th.*—Up at 5.30 and very sleepy. On legs all day and to bed early, and had a bath, badly needed. A very uncomfortable line we hold, for it is sniped from everywhere. Did not move. Gather we are up against the German main position and cannot. Wet night."

Sir John French had planned a further advance for October 20th, but his optimism was not shared by General Pulteney,[1] who commanded the III Corps,[2] which was strung out along the line reached during the advance two days previously. General Pulteney was anxious to consolidate the position gained and to build up as strong reserves as was possible to meet an attack which he felt was imminent. Before, however, his wishes could be complied with the blow fell.

The Germans attacked all along the III Corps front with two Corps, the brunt of the fighting falling upon Congreve's Brigade, which was holding a line some three miles in length. From 7 a.m. onwards the enemy launched a series of attacks which, in spite of the dangerously extended frontage occupied by the defenders, were repeatedly beaten off. At dusk, however, the Germans brought up no less than three Battalions, and with these attacked the Sherwoods, who were holding Ennetières and La Vallée with part of the Battalion, while

[1] Now Lieutenant-General Sir William Pulteney, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] 4th and 6th Divisions.

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the other five Platoons occupied the remaining fifteen hundred yards of front up to the point where rested the left of the 16th Infantry Brigade. The onslaught was irresistible, and in spite of a most gallant defence by the Sherwoods, the enemy succeeded in recovering Ennetières and La Vallée. The situation was, as Congreve himself expresses it, at one time "most precarious." Two of his own Staff were personally engaged, while all his reserves were used up, and between his Headquarters and the assailants there was at one moment only a handful of Signallers.

Yet, it was in such moments of crisis that Congreve was seen at his best, for his nerve never failed him, apropos of which and with special reference to the events of this day one of his Staff writes:

"I hesitate to touch on his bravery, because it is so well known. It showed itself not only in the heat of physical action, but in iron control when calm decisions were vital. I have seen him issuing orders calmly when, as night fell, the Germans could not have been more than three hundred yards from Brigade Headquarters, while all there was to stop them was a squad of about six Signallers strung across the road."

"*October 20th.*—Reports of attacks on our left and centre began to come in at 7 a.m. and not much later, and continued all day, that Leinster Regiment [1] had retired, leaving our left in air. This, coupled with attacks on centre also, took off all my reserve bar one Company to my left. All day came stories of Germans massing in various places and of attacks made and repulsed, and I was beginning to think I was doing well when suddenly about 5 p.m. I heard that the enemy had occupied Ennetières and La Vallée, and that most of Sherwoods 'had gone.' This left our guns in most precarious situation, for Germans at La Vallée were within 400 of them and I had no reinforcements. Colonel Fox,[2] R.A., who was with them, rallied some of Sherwoods and got

[1] 2nd Battalion Leinster Regiment, 17th Infantry Brigade.
[2] Now Brigadier-General R. F. Fox, C.B., D.S.O.

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them up on ridge above guns, and Germans for some inexplicable reason not coming on I was able to get away and establish a sort of line between myself and Germans, but it was a horrible time of anxiety, men trooping back, horses galloping past, and all dark and bullets flying all over the place. W. Yorks remained firm, and eventually at 5 p.m. I got the whole line back and retired behind 16th Brigade on Bois Grenier, and had the relief of being able to wash and sleep. Only 250 of Sherwoods left and about 400 casualties in other three Battalions. A very bad day. Charles [1] had a personal encounter with a German, and Dickinson [2] and his man were fired on from other side of road. Latter killed. Rain added to our discomforts by beginning about 6 p.m. Sat from 10 to 5 a.m. in a wretched farm full of children and refugees, into which about 3 a.m. came two old women in their best clothes, whom one of our men had found in a ditch, simply covered with mud, slime and wet through. I don't think anything I have so far seen has more made me hate war."

Congreve had had a very harassing time. It had been impossible to obtain adequate rest, and the weather had been particularly trying to a man so liable to asthma. On the top, too, of a particularly anxious day had come an entirely sleepless night. The diary entries for the next three days are therefore not a matter for surprise:

"*October 21st, 22nd, 23rd.*—Sat still, seedy with bronchitis. Constant alarms by firing and reports from front of 16th Infantry Brigade. Fine weather. In doctor's hands till 23rd."

For a man just off the sick list the next two days were sufficiently trying.

"*October 24th.*—Reports more alarming. Walked down to see Williams,[3] began to entrench a back line and went down to see how things were in La Guernerie.

[1] Now Brevet Major C. R. Congreve, D.S.O., O.B.E.

[2] Now Lieutenant-Colonel D. P. Dickinson, D.S.O., M.C.

[3] Brigadier-General E. C. Ingouville-Williams, Commanding 16th Infantry Brigade; killed in 1916 when commanding a Division.

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Great uproar, as Leicesters [1] had retired shortly before I got there. Had a council of war with Williams in McMahon's [2] Headquarters, and settled what to do, then sent E. Yorks to help Leicesters dig new line and left them at it and all fairly quiet. Germans as usual did not pursue their advantage. Not in bed till 3 a.m."

He can have obtained, however, only an hour or an hour and a half's sleep, as is shown by the next Diary entry:

"*October 25th.*—Met Williams at five at La Guernerie, and no sooner there than heard Germans shouting as they charged. Got up E. Yorks and sent for 3 R.B.[3] just come to reinforce me and then went up into village to find it all a false report that Leicesters had broken. They were heavily shelled all day and new line had to be taken up owing to retirement from Le Quesne. Busy all day taking it over and entrenching it. Pouring wet night, which I spent until 2 a.m. in tumbling about along line of entrenchments. Leicesters retired behind us at 4 a.m. and all was quiet. To bed about 2.30 a.m.

"*October 26th.*—Fine and fairly quiet day. Heavy shelling at night.

"*October 27th.*—Enemy began heavy bombardment of E. Yorks trench east of railway about 5.30 a.m. and kept it up till six, when he attacked. Repulsed, but all day long very active on that side, and I was kept fearfully anxious by exaggerated reports of his massing troops against the E. Yorks trenches. All round D.L.I. lines after dark.

"*October 28th.*—When up at barrier to see McMahon, where considerable sniping was going on, Wallace and Charles ran across the road and Wallace was hit, a very bad fracture of the thigh. Charles did very well in getting him back, and had four bullets through his clothes in doing so. Got Wallace back on a shutter and away

[1] 1st Battalion Leicesters, 16th Infantry Brigade.

[2] Lieutenant-Colonel B. W. L. McMahon, 2nd Battalion Durham Light Infantry.

[3] 3rd Rifle Brigade.

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on a motor ambulance by 9 a.m. Alan Paley [1] came as my Brigade Major *vice* Wallace."

The retention of the 6th Division in England in the early days of the war was to have very unpleasant results for Congreve.

"*October* 30*th*.—Hear no less than seven Brigadiers junior to me have been made Major-Generals for the first phase of the war before we came out, which seems bad luck on us, for we have to wait for vacancies in the Major-Generals list, which do not occur very frequently."

"*December* 30*th*.—Two more Brigadiers gone over me, which makes ten since the war began."

That Congreve had rightly appreciated the situation on October 19th had been made clear by subsequent events, for the III Corps [2] had been unable to make any impression on the German main position, and there had resulted in the Armentières sector a state of stationary warfare, in which the Germans strove by incessant shelling and frequent threats to attack to pin down their opponents to their existing line, while they themselves transferred every available man and gun to the north, where the mighty conflict was raging which was to determine the fate of the Channel Ports.

It would be tedious to quote at length the Diary entries covering the remainder of the time during which Congreve commanded the 18th Infantry Brigade, and reference will only be made to matters of more than usual interest.

Every day, with the exception only of Sundays, Congreve inspected his front line morning and evening. Sometimes, when he had a visitor, he would go round his line a third time for his visitor's benefit. On such occasions his companion would have no cause to pronounce his

[1] Captain Alan Paley, Rifle Brigade, now Colonel Alan Paley, C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] 4th and 6th Divisions.

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walk lacking in interest, for his host much disliked getting wet and muddy in communication trenches and far preferred walking dry shod—completely indifferent to the target which he was presenting to the enemy—along the top. His visitor too could not fail to remark that the pauses—those all too frequent pauses—which Congreve's asthmatical condition rendered necessary, always seemed to occur at points at which it seemed highly desirable that there should be no dallying!

Both Walter Congreve and his Brigade-Major bore charmed lives, to which many entries in the Diary bear witness.

"*October 30th.*—In evening walked round the trenches with Alan and had quite an exciting time as we dropped in for an outbreak of shelling and had to take refuge in a trench with North Staffords. Each time we tried to get out another salvo arrived within a few yards of us.

"*October 31st.*—Out in a.m. with Alan to see Commanding Officers in village, and again had more of shells than is desirable. One fell fairly close and sent a stone into my hat which spoiled it.

"*November 11th.*—Round trenches in a.m. A Sergeant of Shropshires killed by a sniper as we were standing by.

"*November 16th.*—Round Durham Light Infantry trenches, where I got plastered with mud and wet too. Snipers very troublesome, and shot a man close by us, the sixth morning running that this has happened.

"*November 21st.*—To trenches early and usual man killed, close to us, by a sniper through the loop-hole."

Circumstances may have demanded that Congreve should have always exposed himself as much as he did; on the other hand they may not; and when, in the course of his talk to the young officers attending the VII Corps school, Congreve warned his audience against taking unnecessary risks, it may have occurred to his listeners that their Corps Commander, who set them so perfect an exam-

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ple of soldierly conduct, in one little matter sometimes did not practise what he preached!

As opportunity occurred, the No Man's Land which stretched between the front line trenches of the two combatants was gradually cleared:

"*November 2nd.*—Alan and I had a warm time going round the trenches in a.m. Odd fellows the men are, within two yards of one lies a dead German who has been there since October 25th, and they make no attempt to bury him. Ordered them to do so."

And the tragedy of it all:

"*November 5th.*—Walked round trenches with Alan, and was given some letters and papers from dead officers lying in front of us. One seems to have kept his Diary whilst lying wounded, and on November 3rd wrote: 'I have now been lying here for eight days and feel myself dying. I am burning with fever and have had no food and could not eat it if I had. Good-bye to all my loved ones and friends. I am going fast. Amen.' Another had written a postcard to his wife with a request that if he fell it should be forwarded to her, which we will do our best to do. In it he said: 'Keep your head high' —I liked that."

It is a relief to turn from such grievous matters to the lighter side of things, for even the Great War had its lighter side.

Many entries in Congreve's Diary at this time record the receipt of parcels containing gifts for his men sent out by his own relations and personal friends.

[1]"During the winter of 1914–15, the first winter of the war, the British public was consumed by an intense passion for providing comforts for the troops in the field. Women of all classes vied with one another as to who should knit the largest number of comforters, cardigans, mittens, and goodness knows what. There was, indeed, no end to the articles of apparel, useful or the

[1] For authorities see p. 118 *ante*.

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reverse, which the public in its first blush of martial enthusiasm, was prepared to shower on the troops. The generosity of the public, however, created a little difficulty which had not been foreseen. The Army actually serving in the field in the winter of 1914–15 was small, and consequently but few of the public at home had any personal interest in any one individual at the front."

This state of affairs, in which the personal element was so regrettably lacking, was felt by many sentimental and unattached, though readily attachable, young women to be highly unsatisfactory, and they took steps, through the agony columns of the Press, to open up communication with some one soldier in the field, and thus establish those personal relations, the absence of which was felt to be so unromantic. Realising the prevalence and the intensity of this feeling, it occurred to a Driver in the R.F.A., that to make the first advance himself would be a positive kindness to the unattached fair, besides, no doubt, being of distinct advantage to himself. He therefore inserted a notice in one of the Sunday papers under the pathetic title of "Lonely Soldier." The results may be safely described as surpassing his most sanguine expectations. In one day there arrived for him no less than three thousand letters and seven sacks of parcels![1]

It was clear that the transport of no one unit could cope with such a concentrated display of sympathy. The Battery Commander under whom the lonely one served protested loudly. Equally forcible were the objections of the Director of the Army Postal Service, who pointed out that his organisation, also, was not adapted to deal with a response at once so touching and so embarrassing. The astonishing success of the R.F.A. Driver's little experiment was thought likely to produce imitators, so G.H.Q. hastily requested the War Office to apply for an

[1] It fell to the author of this Memoir to write an account of this incident in the *I.G.C. War Diary*, and he made a note of the figures at the time.

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embargo to be placed on the publication of similar appeals in the Press. This was just as well, for the Director of the Army Postal Service in France was called upon, as it was, in October 1914 to deal with a weekly average of sixty thousand parcels. Little can he have thought, however, that the number would increase and increase until he had to handle in one month more than four and a half million parcels, as was the case during the four weeks immediately prior to Christmas 1916.[1]

Early in November there had arrived in France the Queen's Westminster Rifles, one of those devoted Territorial Force Units the personnel of which had given up their leisure, and in many instances their money, in order to train themselves in days of peace, and had now come out to stand by their comrades of the old Regular Army in the hour of their greatest need.

"*November 12th.*—Queen's Westminsters attached to my Brigade. Ordered to parade them and Durham Light Infantry at 2 p.m. for inspection by Lord Roberts, a great surprise. We lined the street of Erquingheim, and he got out of his motor and walked down the ranks looking just as keen as ever. Lady Eileen was with him and very nice. We showed them some trenches on a back position and then they left to have tea with Rawley.[2]

Lord Roberts at the age of eighty-two was still far from being an old man either mentally or physically. He seemed to possess the secret of perpetual youth, thanks no doubt partly to the fact that in matters great and small he always moved with the times, even to keeping pace with the constant changes in uniform. To see Lord Roberts in uniform was to know what the correct uniform was, for had there been lately an alteration in so much as a single button the veteran Field-Marshal would not have overlooked the fact. His end was such as he would himself have wished.

[1] For authorities see p. 118 *ante*.

[2] The late General Lord Rawlinson, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.

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"*November 15th, Sunday.*—Ice all over roads and bitter wind. Round trenches and got back to hear that Lord Roberts died last night of pneumonia at St. Omer; a sad loss. But to die within sound of the guns was a fitting end for a great soldier and man."

Congreve took from the first the keenest personal interest in the Queen's Westminsters, an interest which was fully appreciated, as the following extract from a letter written by the Officer Commanding the Battalion shows:

"I have always counted myself and my Battalion most extraordinarily happy, in that our war service began under the privilege of his command. The effect of his guiding and his personality took an extraordinary hold on the Westminsters, and the whole Battalion as one man would, I know, have done to the last ounce in them anything he asked of them. The General was beyond question not only an exceptionally brilliant soldier, but that perhaps even rarer thing an outstanding leader of men. This last being a natural gift which is rarely given in the degree that it was to him.

"Of his personal charm, of his absolute fearlessness, of his consideration for those under his command, these are all so well known that it is unnecessary for me to do more than to repeat my appreciation of them.

"He was a very gallant gentleman, an example to try to follow, and, as far as may be given to each one to emulate, to every young soldier in the Army."

The same helpful welcome was extended by Congreve to an Overseas Unit which was attached to his Brigade temporarily.

"*February 17th.*—A Canadian Battalion, the 3rd, attached to me for five days.

"*February 19th.*—Went round the trenches from 4 to 7.30. Everyone loud in praise of the Canadians, and they themselves quite pleased with the day in trenches. I am putting them in for twenty-four hours divided up man for man with Regulars, and after that for twenty-fours in complete Platoons."

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The condition of the trenches in those early days of the war was appalling, for there was a complete absence of that wealth of timber, sandbags, duck-boards, pumps and other appliances for keeping the trenches dry and healthy which marked the later stages of the war.

"*December 8th.*—Out at 6 and not in till 11.30. Water and mud in trenches very bad and parapets all falling in.

"*December 10th.*—Round trenches with Kemp, R.E.[1] Very wet. In places up to calf of leg in water."

"*November 11th.*—Much rain at night. Part of W. Yorks trenches were flooded five feet deep by burst of a dam. Went down with Williams to arrange what was to be done and not back till past eight.

"*December 29th.*—Out from twelve to seven in trenches which have suffered badly from heavy rain of last two days. Some hundreds of yards are under water and parapets fallen in. How to deal with them is a very difficult question, for as fast as one digs new ones, the water comes in. The whole country is water-logged."

Congreve's preference for walking on the top instead of wading through wet communication trenches did not always enable him and Alan Paley to keep dry.

"*December 31st.*—Out to W. Yorks and on to Rifle Brigade in p.m. Fell into a ditch full of water to my middle and very cold.

"*January 2nd.*—Out in morning to trenches near Frelingheim, and had tea with the Westminsters. Fell into a ditch on my way back and got very wet.

"*January 13th.*—To Westminster trenches, and Alan fell into a hole of water waist deep.

"*January 17th, Sunday.*—Forgot it was so until too late for church. To R.E. works in a.m., and in p.m. round trenches. Very dark night. Fell into a latrine."

Now and again we get a gleam of humour from a visit to the trenches, as the following extract from a private Diary kept by one of Congreve's Commanding Officers shows:

[1] Now Brigadier-General G. C. Kemp, C.B., C.M.G.

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"*January* 15*th*, 1915.—Going along "A" Company trench O.C. pointed out to me a short trench dug forward in the direction of enemy which he called a 'listening point.' He called out to find out if the sentries were posted in it; no reply. He called again; no reply. Voice from dug-out, 'Private Jones is up there, sir; he is very deaf!'"

The entry in this same Diary for the following day well merits quotation, for it discloses a patient endurance of hardship which can have few equals and no superior:

"*January* 16*th*, *Saturday*.—Visited "B" Company trenches at 6 a.m. Still wet and muddy, but condition much improved. Three days in bad trenches at L'Epinette did good in some ways, the men are quite happy in the present section and have worked hard to keep it inhabitable. An officer of "B" Company told me that he spoke to two of his men who were lying in a dug-out and asked them if they were all right; they said they were comfortable—he noted they were lying in two inches of water!"

If his surroundings were horrible Congreve was very lucky in other respects, for the 1st and 3rd Battalions of his Regiment were close at hand, and he was constantly seeing old friends, his Brigade Headquarters being a happy meeting-ground for Riflemen, while last but not least Congreve was constantly meeting Billy, who was still A.D.C. to the G.O.C. 3rd Division. Father and son were peculiarly devoted, and seldom failed to write to one another on days upon which they were unable to meet. Billy Congreve, young as he was, had already begun to give proof of ability far removed above the ordinary. In this connection his father records with pride:

"*January* 5*th*.—Heard excellent things of Billy from Smith-Dorrien [1] and Wing." [2]

[1] Now General Sir H. L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., K.C.B., D.S.O.

[2] The late Major-General F. D. Wing, killed in action at Loos in 1915.

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From time to time the arrival of some more than usually interesting visitor is recorded:

"*November 24th.*—Lyon [1] brought the American Attaché to see us, a little man with a woollen helmet under his cap and a khaki great-coat covered with black braid. He said to me: 'The lustre of your arms has never before been equalled.'"

Hardly less pleasing was the news conveyed in a line which completes the entry for this day: "Got a motor-car for my Headquarters."

Occasionally the work of the Censor provided cause for a smile.

"*November 28th.*—One of the men writing home speaks of a tombstone with R.I.P. on it, which he says means, 'Rise if possible.'"

The entry for December 2nd is a notable one:

"To lunch with General Keir and a very good one it was—jugged hare. After, paraded for visit of the King, for which we lined the road, sending representatives from each Battalion and two Companies of W. Yorks, who are out of the trenches. The King shook hands with each and spoke a little."

Congreve was a very strict disciplinarian. Some may have thought him exacting, but none would have disputed the fact that if he exacted much from others, he exacted no less from himself, as one of his Battalion Commanders has pointed out. Two years later, in speaking of discipline to the officers of the VII Corps School, he said:

"Be just, yet severe; never overlook a fault, yet be human." He then proceeded to develop the human side: "Keep up your dignity, but at the same time enter into your men's joys and sorrows and be their friend. See to their comforts before your own, which entails knowing what they should receive in rations, clothing, etc." He

[1] Now Brigadier-General F. Lyon, C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O.

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was indeed very human himself. It was rarely that he returned from one of his trench walks without bringing back for a good dinner and a quiet night—if they were lucky—at Brigade Headquarters some officer whom his sympathetic eye had observed to be in need of a rest.

Brigade Headquarters, however, were not always as restful as could have been wished.

"*December 15th.*—Enemy shelled us all night from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. The shells all went over my house, some hundreds of them, and made me wonder when one would come in!"

The human side of Congreve's nature was shown too, as we have already seen, in his sympathy for the aged—especially women—who suffered from the war. He felt, also, very keenly the terrible toll which the war was levying on the lives of the young. His Diary entry for February 27th bears out this last-mentioned trait in his character. A very great friend of Billy's, Maurice Godolphin Osborne, had died of his wounds, and Congreve writes: "To Bailleul at 7 a.m. for Maurice's funeral. . . . Billy was splendid and quite collected. I felt like a baby."

Once, and once only, in his Diary a note of criticism is struck, a thing which found no place whatever in his conversation or in his letters. He did not agree with the G.H.Q. policy of maintaining the *moral* of the British Army by making small attacks here and there on the enemy's trench system. These attacks were different affairs from the raids which were developed later, in that the former had for their object the occupation and retention of some small point in the enemy's line, while in the case of a raid the aim was to secure an identification of some enemy Battalion or to inflict damage of some sort and then to return home as quickly as possible.

"*December 20th.*—Hear that the attacks on Ploegsteert Wood resulted in loss of three good Riflemen (officers) and five Somersets (officers) and a lot of men.

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Hope it did some good, but these small isolated attacks seem to me deadly. There was the same experience in the north on the 14th. Horrid losses and nothing done with them as far as the uninitiated can see, and uninitiated the men are, even more than I am."

The Diary entry for December 25th is of great interest, for it refers to the extraordinary scenes of fraternisation between our troops and the Germans which took place that day. As Congreve points out in a letter, this fraternisation was not universal all along the line, for in one place a British Battalion was "playing football with the Germans opposite them, while the next Regiments were shooting each other."

In his Diary Congreve says:

"After lunch went to Rue du Bois to take some presents mother had sent for the men, and found a very extraordinary state of affairs. The men had arranged a truce between themselves in a.m., and all day have been walking about together singing and smoking again. The officers also walked and smoked together even to a Colonel. At 4 p.m. it was arranged all were to be back in their trenches and at midnight firing would commence. My friend said he had had a cigar with the best shot in the German Army, who others said had killed more of us than any dozen others, 'but I know where his loop-hole is now and we mean to down him to-morrow.'"

The opening of the New Year, 1915, found Congreve still in command of the 18th Infantry Brigade, very different, alas, except in name from that Brigade which had come out with him from England! In this connection he wrote to a friend at Cambridge:

"There are very few of us left who came out from Cambridge, only fifteen officers in the whole Brigade, and certainly not a thousand men."

Amongst the many owners of billets with whom Congreve came into touch was a certain Mr. Lambert, about whom he writes:

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"*January* 14*th.*—Our landlord dined with us and produced sweet champagne for us. An amusing man and a good talker. He was a hostage to the Germans when they were here, and says they behaved well. 'But you must treat a German like a dog and not interrupt him at his meals.'"

At the beginning of February the constant exposure to cold and wet began to tell upon Congreve.

"*February* 3*rd.*—Asthma troublesome."
"*February* 5*th.*—Very asthmatic all day, which was beautifully fine."
"*February* 6*th.*—Another beautiful day, but I had no wind to enjoy it with. Stayed indoors."

Very occasionally Congreve refers to books which he has read. In particular he mentions three volumes of Carlyle's *Frederick the Great,* which a friend had sent him. He was such a prodigious letter writer that he can have had but little time left for reading anything but the two books which were his constant companion:

"When we went to war in 1914," writes a member of his Staff, "the General carried in his kit, for secular reading, two books—*Tristram Shandy* and Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (the original volume, not the second series). It is hard to believe that anyone could fail to love Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim (they must always come first to mind when *Tristram Shandy* is mentioned) but it is only a soldier who can understand their natures to the full and appreciate the relationship which existed between them. The General held them as intimate friends, and no doubt felt that soldiering in Flanders, where two hundred years ago they had served under Marlborough, brought him still closer to their friendly natures. Palgrave was a constant companion, and I have mentioned that it was his original anthology; I remember the General saying that the second series was but thin stuff by comparison."

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On February 20th Congreve writes: "Heard I am promoted Major-General and mentioned in despatches." From this time onward his advancement was to be very rapid.

At this time Congreve's two brothers-in-law were serving in France. Of these Lieutenant-Colonel J. Shea [1] had succeeded Colonel Furse on the Staff of the 6th Division, while Major A. M. King was with the 4th Battalion Rifle Brigade.

"*March 15th.*—Had a telegram from Thesiger [2] that Kingki was killed near St. Eloi this morning early. Another good fellow gone and a great loss to us as a family." And a great loss to the Army too, for Arthur King was a very able man, and in addition was one of the most famous long-range rifle shots that Cambridge University has ever produced, and that is saying a good deal.

Congreve's strong common sense is well brought out by his remarks on a Horse Show at which he attended:

"*April 6th.*—Went to 6th Division Horse Show and saw some really wonderful work in the way waggons, horses and harness had been turned out. Chains like silver, waggons all new painted and horses shining like the sun. Judges went too much on the quality of the horses, which was nothing to do with their holders, as they had to take what was given to them."

The Diary for this day concludes with a sentence which throws a ray of light on Congreve's independent spirit—he looked to others for their assistance in as few matters as possible, even in matters relating to the barber's chair:

"Stayed in rest of day except for hair-cutting, the first time since I came out that I have not done it myself." Surely a very unique achievement!

[1] Now General Sir John Shea, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] Colonel G. H. Thesiger, C.B., C.M.G., Rifle Brigade, killed in action at Loos when commanding the 33rd Division on September 26th, 1915.

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Early in April the bronchitis which had been threatening for some time became serious:

"*April 8th.*—Woke up very decidedly bronchitisy and stayed in bed. Had a very uncomfortable day."

There followed a fortnight's confinement to his billet, the monotony being relieved by a number of most welcome visitors, not forgetting Billy, who came nearly every day.

"To my great delight my blessed Billy came to-day," writes his father, and once more, "Billy came over again quite late. He does me good."

The devotion of father and son was something very real.

On April 24th Congreve left for home on short leave, returning to France on May 6th. He lost no time in visiting his trenches, and in conveying his appreciation of what he saw to each Battalion.

"I have to-day seen the work which has been done by the Brigade since I went sick, and am astonished at its magnitude and excellence. I am very much pleased and very proud of you. Please tell all your officers and men this and give them my thanks."

At the end of May Congreve's period of command of the 18th Infantry Brigade came to an end, and he received the very welcome intelligence that he was to take over the Command of the 6th Division in place of Sir John Keir, who had been promoted to the command of the VI Corps.

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CHAPTER XII

A DIVISIONAL COMMANDER IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

IN writing to tell his wife that he had been given the Command of the 6th Division, Congreve said: "A Command of about twenty-two thousand men and seventy guns is a heavy responsibility. Please the Blessed Goodness I be equal to it. To give you an idea of what it is, it occupies twelve miles on the road when marching closed up all it can be."

It was an additional pleasure to Congreve that his promotion did not mean severing his association with his old Brigade, for the latter formed part, as has been noted, of the 6th Division, and one of the first duties of the new Divisional Commander was to attend on the Commander-in-Chief in his inspection of the 18th Infantry Brigade.

"*May 29th.*—At two to Bailleul to see General French inspect my old Brigade, four thousand five hundred on parade, and very fine they looked. He made a very complimentary speech, and talked of me as 'that distinguished soldier.' I thought the butter over-thick for our performances."

The 6th Division was under orders at this moment to relieve another Division in the Northern Sector of the Salient, hence Congreve's stay at the then Divisional Headquarters at Croix de Bac was very brief, which apparently was just as well.

"*May 29th.*—Some friction here with our landlady, for my servant when I asked for hot water said, 'I had a dicksee[1] full for you, but the lady has put a cabbage in it!'"

[1] Camp-kettle.

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Officers, possibly, did not always appreciate how much their comfort in billets depended upon the tact with which their soldier servants dealt with the women-folk in the house, a tact which the British soldier-servant displayed in a very considerable degree. To this general rule there were, of course, exceptions. In this connection the writer remembers an incident which occurred to a friend of his who, with his servant, was billeted above an estaminet in Flanders. From the estaminet every morning had come a most excellent cup of coffee. On one morning, however, there was no coffee, and enquiry being made elicited the fact from the soldier-servant that he and the girl in the estaminet had "had words." "Oh, really, what did you say to her?" "Well, I hardly said a word, sir." "What actually did you say?" "Well, sir, all I said was 'God help the man that marries a girl with a face like yours,' and she has looked at me very old-fashioned ever since." The result is hardly to be surprised at, for it was late in the war, and all estaminet girls in Flanders by that time had acquired a very workable knowledge of English.

On moving into the Salient Congreve's Headquarters were for the time being fixed at the Château Conteau, three miles north-west of Poperinghe.

The 6th Division had come from what passed in those days for a quiet Sector, something very different from what the Division now found itself in near Ypres.

"*June 2nd.*—Very hot. Walked with Kemp, my C.R.E., through Ypres to see my trenches, and came in for many shells. We were shelled all down the road on our return, and had to dodge into houses and ditches to avoid them. There was one church whose spire, a real big one like those on Salisbury Cathedral, still stood. As we were passing it was hit. Its tower, already much broken, collapsed, and the spire sank down intact into the ruins of the tower like a huge extinguisher and vanished in an enormous cloud of dust."

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The move of the 6th Division brought Congreve nearer to Billy, which he notes in a letter to his wife. The boy was, evidently, developing very fast.

"I saw Billy. His Division is next to us, so I shall I hope see lots of him. He seemed very well, and I was again astonished at his knowledge of the situation, his clear way of putting it, and the way everyone seems to like him and believe in him."

On June 8th Congreve moved his Headquarters to Vlamertinghe Château, where he remained until the termination of his Command of the Division.

He had now completed his own personal Staff with the two Aides-de-camp allowed him, after some difficulty it is true, for Regular Officers of any experience were not to be had, their services being so urgently required with their Regiments. There was not the same objection to the employment of young officers of the New Army, and in this connection the following story is told.

A poor mother—and which of us does not sympathise with her—anxious to minimise the risks of the war for her son, was telling a celebrated War Correspondent that she had persuaded a General to take on her boy as A.D.C., to which her friend replied: "That will be a relief to you; you will not need to worry any more. By the way, though," he added, "who is the General?" "Oh, General Congreve." "Heavens!" cried the War Correspondent, who had but lately been personally conducted round the front line by Walter Congreve, "A.D.C. to General Congreve! For God's sake send the boy back to the trenches and safety!" Thus the fame of those front-line walks reached London.

For the first two months of the 6th Division's service in the Salient nothing of any particular moment occurred. Congreve mentions attending many conferences held at Cassel by Sir Herbert Plumer, who was now in Command

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of the Second Army, and he mentions even more numerous interviews in the Divisional area with the Army Commander, whose personal touch with his troops was of the closest description.

One of Congreve's most noticeable traits when Commanding the 18th Infantry Brigade had been his liking for frequent conferences, at which he discussed the situation with his Battalion Commanders. These conferences were most valuable, for after a full discussion, in which Congreve would listen most carefully to what any Battalion Commander might have to say, he would then give his decision—a result which does not always attend on conferences! These conferences he continued with the best results in the 6th Division. To the troops themselves the figure of their Divisional Commander became as well-known as it had been in the 18th Infantry Brigade, so frequent were Congreve's visits to his front-line trenches, while he paid great attention to his Field Ambulances, Laundry Baths and Supply Column, upon whose efficiency the comfort and health of his troops depended.

Congreve took full advantage of the ample accommodation existing in Vlamertinghe Château to exercise a boundless hospitality which he extended to all and sundry as can be seen from his Diary. Yesterday, in addition to many other guests at various meals, "a boy called Farr of the Middlesex Regiment, lost on his way to join, dined and slept with us." To-day the Army Commander and his A.D.C. came to lunch, while "Pulteney and Londonderry came to tea, and Billy, Swan [1] and Tom Grenville [2] dined. Francis arrived at 10.30 on return from leave home asking for a bed." To-morrow as many more guests are expected; the stream was ceaseless.

One or two entries in the Diary are of special interest.

[1] Lieutenant C. F. T. Swan, Rifle Brigade.

[2] Now Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. T. G. B. Morgan-Grenville-Gavin, D.S.O., M.C., Rifle Brigade.

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"*July 3rd.*—Heard Billy is to be shortly made G.S.O. 3." [1]

"*July 4th.*—Shea left for Kemmel to take over Command of 151st Infantry Brigade. I shall miss him greatly."

Early in July Mr. Asquith and Lord Kitchener arrived on a visit to Ypres, and were met by Congreve in Poperinghe. Congreve had not met the Prime Minister before, and the latter's disregard for appearances somewhat surprised him.

"*July 7th.*—Saw Mr. Asquith and Lord Kitchener inspect K.S.L.I. in Poperinghe. Both seemed cheery and pleasant and cordial. Mr. Asquith the oddest figure ever I saw. He had a green trilby hat, badly fitting flannel suit, brown canvas shoes with rubber soles, and an old tie with turned-down collar, no gloves or stick. But I liked his face, and he amused me a good deal. I asked him how things were going, and he said, with a side-long smile, almost a wink, 'Oh, pretty well.'"

The figure of the veteran Prime Minister bearing his vast burden of responsibility with a smiling face must have been one which particularly appealed to Walter Congreve.

This was the last occasion on which Congreve was fated to see Lord Kitchener, for soon afterwards there left the United Kingdom never to return the great man who, by the magic of his name, had roused a somnolent people to a realisation of the peril in which they stood and of the magnitude of the military effort required of them. Mistakes Lord Kitchener doubtless made—and who, similarly situated, would not have done the same? —but the historian of the future will surely stress the fact that, while Lord Kitchener shared his mistakes with others, both in foreseeing the many years of war and in calling for the creation of the New Armies without a

[1] General Staff Officer, 3rd Grade.

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moment's delay, he rendered a service to his country of the first magnitude, the credit for which is his, and his alone.

Congreve was now about to be given a chance of displaying his ability as a Divisional Commander in an attack.

"*July 30th.*—A very noisy night owing to German attack on Hooge, which resulted in a loss of a lot of ground. The Germans used flames of oil or gas against us for the first time."

"*July 31st.*—My reserve Brigade taken for an attack on position lost last night, but order cancelled, and instead my whole Division is to come out and retake it. The whole conduct of the operation is in my hands."

Before committing his Division to the attack Congreve took infinite pains to ensure success by the closest personal reconnaissance.

"*August 1st.*—Out with Boyd[1] from nine to five to see the ground we are to attack, and very nasty it is. A glacis up to the Menin road from the edge of the woods we now hold and every yard of it overlooked. On getting back found Plumer waiting to see me and much to arrange."

It is characteristic of Congreve that, in spite of the press of work, he found time to lend a helping hand to someone who stood in need of it.

"*August 2nd.*—Letter from Williams, Alan's servant, in hospital, and wanting me to get him sent home. Wrote about him."

"*August 4th.*—Out from ten to four with Boyd round Hooge position. It looks nastier each time I see it. Keir came in evening with offer of some French smoke-making contrivance which I will try."

[1] The successor to Lieutenant-Colonel J. Shea on the Staff of the 6th Division, now Major-General Sir Gerald Boyd, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M.

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"*August 6th.*—Another noisy night. Plumer came to see me. In p.m. round trenches with Boyd. Some rain and much shelling. Brought back the Town Major Ypres for dinner and a quiet night."

The quiet was only comparative, for the Diary entry concludes with: "German Naval gun shelled grounds to-day and put some pieces through my windows—too close."

At this juncture Congreve, who was well aware of the work unostentatiously carried on by his Staff, received a letter from home, in which the writer mentions having heard adverse criticism of the Staff in France. Congreve lost no time in replying and with his usual strong common sense.

"There never was a war yet in which the Staff has not failed and never will be one, because nothing but a superman could avoid some failures. The Regimental Officers and soldiers have never since war began been so well-done as they have in this one, and I am sorry So-and-so comes home with such complaints, though I quite understand the feeling for them and the temptation to air them. If he had any conception of what Staff work means in such undertakings as these, he would be less critical."

The preparation for the attack now being complete, Divisional Headquarters moved forward to their battle station.

"*August 7th, Sunday.*—Early service in the Château. Moved into Ypres and settled in one of the old casemates of the seventeenth-century fortifications. A huge tunnel, about forty yards long, twenty-five feet high and twenty feet broad. It holds us all, and is furnished with tables, chairs and mattresses from the ruined houses."

"*August 8th.*—Our bombardment began at 2.45 a.m. and lasted thirty minutes. Under cover of it Infantry got out of their trenches and as close to Germans as they could. At 3.15 they assaulted and got in without much

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opposition and made good the line with wire and sandbags. Then Germans began to shell them heavily and caused all the losses we had, about one thousand one hundred in all. Durhams got the worst of it and held on splendidly. Got all the wounded in the Battalions removed under cover of darkness. An anxious time and a very long day."

"*August 9th.*—Much shelling all day, but no attempt at attack. Some Durhams came out of Hooge stables at night. They had held them all the time. We prepared a feast for them outside our tunnel, but they did not come, and many wild cats ate it."

Some doubt existed—as often is the case—as to what our troops held and what they didn't. Amongst other things the ownership of the famous Hooge Crater was in question. To settle the matter Congreve went to investigate affairs on the spot.

"*August 10th.*—Out with Boyd to Crater, which we had much difficulty in getting into, as no one was in it and no communication into it. Once there it was worth doing." The visit to the Crater is well described in a letter.

"*August 12th.*—The Crater stands higher than anything else. It was made by a mine we exploded about a month back, and is a huge conical hole forty feet deep and seventy yards diameter. Owing to the shell fire the whole ground round about it and the trenches we took is a mass of holes made by the shells. I found our men holding the front trench, but no one could tell me anything about the Crater itself or the ground to east of it towards the stables, so I had to crawl into various shell-holes and then make a run over the Crater's edge which, being higher than all else, was in full view of any German trenches in the vicinity. I got in and an extraordinary sight it was. The enormous hole had been evidently used by the Germans to live in, for it had dug-outs all round it; scattered all about it were bodies, rifles, bombs, ammunition, and I don't know what else of débris. There were nearly two hundred dead Germans in it, but not a

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live soul except myself and, directly after, Boyd. We got some men into it and then continued our exploration and so home after five hours' walking. It is a bad place altogether, everywhere dead men, some days old, and some blown all to bits. You step over them in the trenches and see them wherever you look out of the trenches. Our bombardment killed many, the Durhams many more, and we ourselves must have a couple of hundred lying about dead, to say nothing of all those killed when the Germans attacked on the 30th. Horrible sights, and yet no one seems to mind them, and I did not myself. We also experienced the biggest minnenwerfer, for he fired twice whilst I was up there. Both went over my head and fell about twenty yards beyond me. You can hear it coming and see it coming and its fall is a huge crash like an 8-in. shell in violence. One fell into the Crater just before I got into it. It raised a column of dust so thick I could see nothing for several moments, and a smell of dead things quite horrible. My hair was filled with a dust I don't like to think of."

In the same letter Congreve adds a note of interest to a Naturalist. "All through the bombardment, when thousands of shells were flying backwards and forwards, the birds seemed quite unaffected. Swallows, pigeons, doves, sparrows and finches I saw all going about their ordinary duties as if there was nothing out of the ordinary going on."

The letter ends with a yarn: "Here is a story for you. A German officer said to an English one: 'You fight for money but WE for glory,' to which he received answer, 'Yes, and neither of us gets it.'"

Geoffrey, now a midshipman, had arrived on leave from the Grand Fleet:

"*August* 11*th*.—With Geoff. To Lovie Château to meet Sir John French, C.-in-C., who was very complimentary about our battle, saying it was one of the best-done small operations of the war. Geoff. went round the trenches dressed in khaki."

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The entry for August 11th fills up the little book in which Congreve began, on August 4th, 1914, to record the events of the Great War. It is known that he kept a Diary throughout the remainder of the war, but no trace of it can be found. As in the case of the Boer War we have his Diary for the first twelve months and then no more, a very curious coincidence.

During the remainder of Congreve's command of the 6th Division the latter was concerned in no events of importance.

Amongst minor happenings that are recorded in his letters at this time, three little pictures stand out; the first, that of Congreve himself happily employed gardening amongst the roses at Vlamertinghe Château; the second, that of Christopher, aged ten, arriving on a short visit to his father's Headquarters; lastly that of a prominent member of the Labour Party who came for a trip to the trenches carrying a vast umbrella, which he proceeded to unfurl at a peculiarly unhealthy spot, an invitation to the Boche sniper which the visitor's indignant escort took prompt steps to suppress.

To the above must be added from another source a picture of the Divisional Commander's car moving down the Ypres–Vlamertinghe road at night with its lamps all ablaze in direct contravention of the strictest orders to the contrary; Congreve preferring to incur the risk of a Boche shell rather than to endure the delay inseparable from groping his way lampless through the dense mass of transport which, without any lights, thronged Ypreswards after dark. When stopped by the Military Police or Traffic Control Posts, Congreve would merely look out of the window and say to whoever had stopped him: "General Congreve, tell Major Tufton;[1] drive on." The next morning some such scene as the following would take place:

[1] Provost-Marshal, 6th Division, now Major the Lord Hothfield, D.S.O.

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"Good morning, Tufton. Got some papers for me? What are they all about?"

"Complaints about you, sir."

"Oh, really, what have I been doing?"

"Driving with lights again, sir."

"Well, what do you propose to do with them?"

"Into the W.P.B., sir, I suggest."

"Quite right. The best and only place for them."

This little farce was enacted on several occasions.

It only remains before passing on to another chapter in Congreve's war experiences to record an appreciation of him as a Divisional Commander written by an officer who was in the best position to form a correct judgment:

"General Congreve was the best Divisional Commander I have ever met. He knew his own mind, made his own plans, and left the rest to his Staff, without interference of any kind. He was never happier than when in the front line with the troops, and in this respect he was courageous almost to a fault. I well remember, just after the battle of Hooge, he and I and his boy in the Navy being caught in a very nasty bombardment between the front and support lines which kept us pinned to the ground for some time. He of course thoroughly enjoyed it, but I can't say I did!

"The 6th Division had the greatest confidence in him.

"He was devoted to the troops and always thinking of them, and I need hardly say that they warmly reciprocated it, officers and men.

"He suffered at times terribly from asthma, but of course he never let it interfere for a moment with his work. Many times during my visits to the trenches, especially at nasty places when we had to move quickly, I have seen him lean against a trench for breath. I saw him win his Victoria Cross at Colenso and have always admired him very much."

In the autumn of 1915 the British Army reached its maximum strength with the arrival of the New Armies. There resulted an increase in the number of Army Corps,

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to one of which, the XIII, Congreve was posted in Command with the temporary rank of Lieutenant-General.

An Army Corps was a fine Command, some seventy thousand strong. The number of guns varied from time to time, being as low as two hundred on a defensive front and as high as eight hundred and fifty to nine hundred on an offensive front.[1]

Congreve left the 6th Division with very genuine regret, a feeling which was mutual. About this he writes:

"I left my old Division very sadly. Billy and John came to luncheon to see me off, and Billy went with me as far as his own house about ten miles. I had a dreadful day of partings, and then when I thought all done I found the road lined by several Battalions who waved their hats and cheered as I passed. Dear, dirty fellows, how I do hate leaving them in all the discomforts and dangers of those parts. If only I could have brought them with me."

[1] The figures quoted are for the 1917 campaign.

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CHAPTER XIII

A CORPS COMMANDER IN FRANCE

FOR the record of Walter Congreve's services during the remainder of the Great War we must, in the absence of his Diaries, rely for the most part on appreciations written by those with whom he was most intimately associated. There are, of course, the letters written by himself, but the number of these which have survived is small, curiously small in fact if one calls to mind how wide a circle of correspondents he had and how regularly he wrote to them. Those, however, to whom he wrote from the front seem seldom to have kept his letters, and the reason no doubt is that the stringency of the censorship regulations made such letters very ordinary reading, for they were, most properly, chiefly remarkable for what they left out and not for what they contained. He who endeavours to write a Memoir of a prominent military figure during the Great War cannot but envy the biographer of the Napoleonic Wars, for in those days the letters written by senior officers in the field, whether they were unrestrained outbursts of a Picton [1] or the more cautious—and sometimes unsigned—writings of a Hill,[2] were full of facts about men and things and of the greatest value to the historian or the student.

The XIII Corps was, on its formation, posted to the Third Army, which had taken over from the French a long stretch of front in Picardy. There the winter passed peacefully enough, far removed from the constant strife of the stormy Salient where Billy Congreve, boy though he was, was making so great a name for himself.

[1] H. B. Robinson's *Life of Sir Thomas Picton.*
[2] E. Sidney's *Life of Lord Hill.*

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In the spring of 1916 the XIII Corps was transferred to the Fourth Army, which had recently been raised by Walter Congreve's old friend General Sir Henry Rawlinson, to whom had been allotted the principal rôle on the British side in the forthcoming Anglo-French offensive astride of the Somme.

In preparation for the coming struggle May and June were a period of intense energy. There was much indeed requiring the personal attention of a Corps Commander, while in Congreve's particular case a further responsibility was incurred by the fact that the XIII Corps was on the extreme right of the British line, and it was all important that co-operation with the adjacent French Corps should be maintained in perfect harmony.

That the liaison established was very perfect is proved by the success which attended the operations of the XIII Corps and its French neighbour, the famous "Corps de Fer," a result which was no doubt due in a large measure to Congreve's tact, *savoir faire* and charm.

With the British Corps on his left Congreve's relations were no less happy, and to this reference will be made presently.

The preparations being at last complete, a heavy preliminary bombardment began on June 24th and continued till July 1st, on which day at an early hour the attack was launched by the Allies simultaneously along the whole front. The results achieved varied considerably; the XIII Corps alone amongst the British Corps engaged attaining all its objectives, including the Montauban Ridge. This was a very notable feat of arms, which was all the more welcome in that taking them as a whole the results of the first day's fighting were somewhat disappointing compared with the magnitude of the effort made.

Of Congreve as a colleague at this time Lord Horne [1] writes as follows:

[1] The late General Lord Horne.

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"On July 1st, when we made the attack on the German position, I commanded the XV Corps opposite Fricourt and Mametz, and Congreve's XIII Corps was on my right in front of Montauban, etc. We were therefore constantly meeting, and I got to know him well. No one could have been a better neighbour as you can imagine—always ready to take his full share or more and to render any help he could. He was a good deal bothered with asthma at that time, and I used frequently to go to his Headquarters and find him in bed. But no bodily trouble was ever allowed to affect his keenness and determination to carry out his duty to the full."

The possession of the Montauban Ridge was exploited on July 14th by Sir Henry Rawlinson, who launched a successful attack on the enemy's second system of defence. In these operations Congreve played a notable part both in the protection of the right flank with one Division and by executing a long night approach march with his remaining two Divisions prior to the assault of the German position.

The battle and the steps leading up to it are clearly explained in the Army Commander's Private Journal:[1]

"The scheme for the attack of the second line had been drawn up by me in detail for some days previously. I had worked it out carefully in every detail, with Corps and Divisional Commanders, and though the Commander-in-Chief was at first reluctant to grant permission to carry it out, on account of the risk entailed by a night attack, he finally acquiesced, and authorised me to put it into execution, and the attack was duly made on July 14th at 3.25 a.m.

"The Divisions which undertook this attack were the 21st, 7th, 3rd, and 9th, the two former belonging to the XV Corps,[2] and the two latter to the XIII Corps. Each Division had two Brigades in the front line and one in

[1] *Life of General the Lord Rawlinson*, by Sir Frederick Maurice, pp. 163–4–5.

[2] Commanded by Lieutenant-General (later General Lord) Horne.

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reserve, and the right flank was protected by the 18th Division,[1] which attacked Trones Wood at 6 p.m. on the evening before, and had by daylight firmly established themselves on the eastern edge of it.

. . . . .

"Apart from the actual assault of the enemy's front line trench, the task of the Infantry was no easy one. The two Divisions of the XIII Corps had an open slope of about 1,500 yards to traverse before reaching the enemy's line. On this open slope there was no cover whatever, and, as far as we could judge, it was probably swept by the enemy's infantry fire, and could certainly be well covered by his artillery barrage. The task of the XV Corps was easier, for that the northern edge of Mametz Wood and Flat-Iron Copse gave some cover under which the assaulting lines could form.

"In considering the plan of attack, it was obvious that to send the Infantry of the XIII Corps across this 1,500 yards of open, in broad daylight, would be a very hazardous operation, and we were all strongly of opinion that the only reasonably safe method for undertaking this advance was under cover of darkness. There were great risks in moving so large a body of troops across the open in the dark, but the very careful preparations made by the 9th and 3rd Divisions[1] in marking out the ground with posts and tapes, and by the construction of a series of strong points along the spurs which ran southwards from the enemy's position, enabled them to carry out this difficult enterprise without a hitch."

The successful issue of these operations was followed by a month of what the Commander-in-Chief styled "a wearing-out battle," in which the XIII Corps did all that was required of it, and then by a most unfortunate illness Walter Congreve's share in the Somme Battle was brought to an abrupt end. On August 10th he suddenly became very ill indeed, the result of cholera nostras, his collapse being rapid and his condition at one time critical.

Whilst the Corps Commander was on the sick list the

[1] Belonging to the XIII Corps.

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XIII Corps Headquarters were moved into a back area for a rest, being rejoined by Congreve in the middle of September. The Corps was then sent to the First Army, and had no further share in the principal fighting of that year.

As Walter Congreve was not to figure again in the great Somme offensive of 1916, it will not be out of place to record here the opinion about him held by the Staff Officer with whom he was most intimately associated at this time. This officer writes:

"The history of what General Congreve did with his Corps shows clearly to my mind that within the opportunities afforded him no man could have done more, and I am equally convinced that only the *very* few could have done so well.

"What he could have made of the greater opportunities of a larger command nobody *knows*; those of us who had the privilege of seeing him nearest as a Corps Commander are those who are most convinced that he was capable of achieving the greatest success with a far higher command.

"There is no question that he was a very fine Corps Commander—personally I suppose I may be said to be prejudiced, but in my opinion there was no finer in the British or any other Army. Certainly from the point of view of his Staff he was as near perfection as is given to mortal man to be.

"Everything that he did was based on the most careful and thorough thought and a very sound knowledge of his profession, both theoretical and practical, as the experience of actual *command* in all the higher grades. He *knew* what Brigades and Divisions should be able to do because he had commanded them in actual war, and when he commanded any unit he acquired the most thorough and practical knowledge of all the details of that unit. No Commander that I ever knew studied the comfort of his troops or did more for them within the limits of what was possible under the existing conditions than he did, and yet no man was more prepared, and able, to get the last ounce out of them in battle.

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"Of his personal courage, I mean physical courage, of course, it is superfluous to speak, but he always reminded me in that way of the late Lord Airlie, as being one of the perhaps three men I have happened to know who really seemed to like being in a horribly dangerous place. It was only his sound and sensible view of what a Commander was justified in exposing himself to that ever kept him out of all the worst places he could have got into. But he had in an exceptionally large measure that far rarer and far more valuable moral courage which on the one hand enabled him to accept the greatest risks to his command, when he had thoroughly satisfied himself that they were justifiable, and on the other hand prevented him from ever undertaking risks which he was convinced were not justifiable without most carefully pointing out the whole situation to his superiors, whoever they might be, and satisfying himself that they knew all the details of the actual situation and what the risks and probable casualties involved really were. Once he was sure that the superior really knew what he was ordering and considered it justified under all the circumstances, there was nothing he would not attempt. He was never guilty of blind obedience, without explanation of his view of what appeared to him impracticable.

"No officer in high command was less open to the charge of having needlessly sacrificed the lives of his men. He was far too fine a character ever to adopt that not uncommon attitude: 'Well, I am ordered to do it and there is the end of it; I can't tell my Commander I can't do things.'

"As to training. The XIII Corps was organised, made, and trained by him, and the striking success which he gained at the opening of the Somme Battle in 1916 was gained by the Divisions which he had trained as a Corps.[1] Later on, of course, Divisions passed rapidly through the hands of a Corps Commander, with the training of which he had had nothing to do.

"He was an excellent trainer, and an excellent inspector of a Division or other unit at its training. He always insisted sharply on *battle essentials*, and was quick to notice and suppress anything off that line, and he could

[1] The 18th, 30th, and 9th Divisions.

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always correct and get his will carried out by suggestions which did not put up the back of his subordinate Commanders.

"As regards fighting. General Congreve was never content to command from the map. He was absolutely indefatigable in getting to see for himself all that was possible for him to see (and sometimes possibly by going where he hardly should have gone). He always wanted to see the men in the line, and to know at first hand under what conditions they were living and fighting. It was partly no doubt owing to this that troops had such great confidence in him. They knew that he knew their condition, their numbers, and their difficulties, and they felt they were in the hands of a man who did not ask impossibilities because he didn't realise what they were up against.

"I will not enlarge on the state of his health, except to say that though it must at times have limited what it was physically possible for him to get through, it was never admitted as a reason for not doing all that was physically possible, and that was much more than many a stronger man would have undertaken. If his health was ever considered at all I am quite sure it was never the health of Walter Congreve but simply that of the Corps Commander. I have often seen him come back from the trenches wet through and covered with mud to the waist after a long day's tramp round units in the worst part of the line, yet on his return he would be ready at once to be bothered over indoor problems as long as there was anything requiring his attention.

"And when I say at once I mean at once; any of his Staff or others who had to see him could always rely on doing so immediately without waiting, wherever he was and whatever he was doing. You never had to wait 'till the General was ready,' unless he was engaged in some other business equally urgent.

"In battle he was never rattled, and took all news good and bad with equal calmness.

"That no personal considerations were ever allowed in the least to affect his conduct of the military operations I know only too well from personal observation when the test was the greatest a man could be put through.

"I shall never forget the incident or lose the admiration

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I felt for the marvellous self-suppression of the 'man' in the capacity of the Commander.

"Billy Congreve was killed,[1] as you know, when under the General's command, and so it happened to fall to my lot to break the news to him. The circumstances are probably well known to you. It was at a very important and critical moment, when the Corps were on the point of carrying out a very important and very daring operation, and where the direction of the Corps Commander was of the greatest importance. When I told him what had happened he was absolutely calm to all outward appearance, and after a few seconds of silence said quite calmly, 'He was a good soldier.' That is all that he allowed to appear, and he continued dealing with everything as it came along in the same imperturbable and quietly decisive way as usual. You know perhaps even better than I what the loss of that son meant to him."

In his letters written at this time Walter Congreve displayed a similar restraint. After much hesitation, and with great diffidence, the Author of this Memoir sent a line expressing his sympathy and begging that under no circumstances Congreve would dream of replying. Back an answer came none the less, the last line of which ran: "I think he would have made a good Rifleman." Those who knew Billy Congreve will agree that high as was the standard associated by the father with the expression "good Rifleman," that standard had already been reached —and exceeded—by his very splendid son.

The winter of 1916–17 passed quietly so far as the XIII Corps was concerned.

There followed in the spring the Battles of Arras, in

[1] On July 20th, 1916, when carrying out a most daring reconnaissance, for which gallant action and several similar ones performed during the Somme fighting he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. At the age of twenty-five he already had been awarded a Brevet Majority, the D.S.O., the Military Cross, and the Legion of Honour. Further, he had been noted for the command of an Infantry Brigade, and had been already on a previous occasion recommended for the Victoria Cross. He married, on June 1st, 1916, Pamela, daughter of Mr. Cyril Maude (now the Hon. Mrs. William Fraser).

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which the XIII Corps under Congreve took a very distinguished part, being continuously engaged from April 9th to May 4th.

In the middle of June of this year (1917) the inevitable happened, and Congreve was very severely wounded. The circumstances which led up to this event and Congreve's action after receiving his wound were so typical of the man that the story merits being told at length.

Writing after the war, an old friend of Congreve's, a brother Rifleman and at one time a Divisional Commander under him in the XIII Corps, says:

"His personal courage was extraordinary. He was always about amongst the front line troops, and was a magnificent example to the men of a complete disregard of shelling or any other form of Boche hatred. Of course you cannot go on—for four years—at this game and not get hit, and Squibs [1] and his A.D.C. were hit practically full pitch by a 5.9 H.E. shell just in front of the railway line at the foot of the Vimy Ridge, between the Ridge and Arleux. This was a notoriously bad place. The Vimy Ridge had a long gentle forward slope all in plain view of the Boche, and they used to snipe with their Artillery at anyone who exposed himself there. Nevertheless, Squibs would walk across these two miles of open most unconcernedly and of course they got him at last. His left hand was almost completely blown off, and he was a good deal cut and knocked about."

The officer who was with Congreve when he was hit has very kindly written the following:

"When W. N. C.[2] was wounded we had just visited a Brigade Headquarters, and were strolling down the eastern face of the Vimy Ridge on to the plain below to visit one or two Batteries situated a quarter of a mile

[1] Walter Congreve's Regimental nickname, see p. 16 ante.

[2] Outside of his Regiment Congreve was widely known as W. N. C., owing to his trick of almost invariably signing his letters with his initials only.

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in front of the Ridge. We went along a track on the grass. I had noticed that the Boche had dropped a couple of shells on the track just before, and I remarked to W. N. C. that it might be as well to walk to the side. Naturally he paid no attention, and within a minute we heard the rush of two shells and the business was done. He went down—quite a useless thing to do!—and so did I. When the bang came I rolled—quite uselessly—into a small hole, then got up and didn't see him. He had been knocked into a big shell hole about five yards away, and was lying nursing the very bad wound in his wrist. I ran as fast as I could to the nearest Battery, and got two men and a stretcher, and we went back with W. N. C. to the nearest road, the Battery having meantime telephoned for a car to meet us. W. N. C. didn't like the stretcher, and insisted on walking. He was quite silent till just before we got to the dressing-station, when he handed me back my handkerchief which I had tied roughly round his wrist and apologised for making it in such a mess! Just as he got out of the car he reeled and nearly fainted, and that was the first sign he showed of having felt anything. He was operated on at the nearest Casualty Clearing Station almost at once," the shattered remnants of his left hand being amputated. Within an hour he was sitting up in bed dictating a letter about a "missing" man.

Apropos of this particular incident a sister writes:

"In 1917 I was cooking for Land Girls and one of them told me that she and all her family were much distressed, as her only brother was reported 'missing,' and they could get no tidings of him. Finding that he was in my brother's Army Corps I wrote to him to ask if he could find out anything about Mr. Hall. About a week later I received a long letter dictated by my brother, giving every detail of the inquiries he had made which left little doubt that the boy had been killed. The letter ended: 'Please forgive this dictated letter, but an hour ago, between the Boche and our doctors, I was relieved of my left hand, so did not want to write myself more than I could help.'

"As a matter of fact, my brother had written himself

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to tell our mother of the loss of his hand, as he thought it would be a shock to her to receive a dictated letter."

So thoughtful for others, so entirely regardless of self and his own suffering was this extraordinary man.

Of this episode in Congreve's career Lord Horne, at that time Commanding the First Army, wrote:

"When I heard that he had been hit and his hand amputated I felt very anxious, as his health had not been good, and I was afraid that the shock might affect him seriously. I had just been telephoning to my D.M.S. to make enquiries for me when a note in Congreve's own handwriting was brought to me. I remember the words well: 'DEAR GENERAL,—Barring the loss of a left hand I am much as usual.' He then continued by asking me to take steps to prevent his being sent down to the Base and so losing his Corps, and to see that he was not detained in hospital! I saw him that afternoon or next day. It was not possible to prevent him losing his command as, although his spirit was unaffected his bodily health was very poor, and it was essential that he should have treatment and rest. So he had to go home. His letter quoted above is typical of the man."

Congreve remained at home for the remainder of 1917, during which time he was created a K.C.B.

Reference has been made to Sir Walter Congreve's aversion to having anything done for him that he could by any possibility do for himself. The loss of his hand made surprisingly little difference to him in this respect. He had an iron hook fitted to the stump of his left arm, and once he had become accustomed to the alteration in balance, he resumed his former mode of life much as usual. He could no longer be his own hair cutter, but he dressed himself, even to the tying of bow ties, without assistance, and pursued his favourite hobbies of gardening and carpentering as energetically as before. Nor was his riding affected, for his horses, which had always gone

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so well for him, went no less well for him now. There was, however, one of his many activities which his family would gladly have seen him abandon, and that was the driving of his own car. When he had had both hands his passengers had suffered moments of keen anxiety, and these were in no way diminished when the beauties of the countryside were being pointed out with the iron hook, while the safety of all on board hung on the driving of the car by their host's only remaining hand.

On the first day of the New Year he was promoted Lieutenant-General for his services in the field, thus confirming the rank which he had held as a temporary measure since he took over command of the XIII Corps in the autumn of 1915.

Two days after his promotion he assumed command of the VII Corps in France. This Corps formed part of the Fifth Army, then commanded by General Sir Hubert Gough. Congreve found the VII Corps holding the line east of Péronne, its left flank resting on the Third Army about Gouzeaucourt.

For reasons beyond the control of the Commander-in-Chief the Fifth Army was called upon to hold an extent of front far too great for the number of troops at General Gough's disposal. This very dangerous state of affairs naturally attracted the attention of General von Ludendorff, who was strenuously engaged in perfecting his plans for the employment of the numerous Divisions whose transference from the Eastern front to the Western had been made possible by the breakdown of Russia and her exit from the War.

The imminence of the danger which confronted the Fifth Army in its perilous state of over-extension was fully recognised at British G.H.Q., and Congreve found the VII Corps, in common with the remainder of the Fifth Army, very busily occupied constructing defences to meet the coming storm, a task so great as to preclude all idea of withdrawing Divisions from the front line for

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training in the back area, as had been the practice in previous winters.

The opening of the New Year found Congreve far from well, as his letters show. Writing to his mother on January 5th he said:

"I am fairly well, no more, and find I cannot get up and down the hills of which this country is full, and the ground is now too hard and the snow too deep to ride. I shall do better when the snow goes."

A month later he writes to Lady Congreve:

"I keep much the same, I fear, one day better the next worse, but if I keep thus I shall get well, for every day brings us nearer to spring."

There was much demanding the personal attention of the new Corps Commander, and in spite of ill-health Sir Walter Congreve grappled with the numerous problems which faced him with his customary energy. He was as usual to be seen very frequently in his front line, and he had in addition the construction of rearward positions of defence to consider. This latter task he carried out on horseback, though riding over the old battlefields of 1916 with their vast derelict trench systems and numberless shell-holes was not everyone's *métier*, as may be supposed. Apropos of this a member of his Staff writes:

"General Congreve was a very energetic man and extraordinarily fearless. I don't think that fear existed in his composition. This I sometimes thought made him a little reckless. He used to ride about well up in the forward area, and when he came to an old trench would try to jump it rather than find a way round; the result, twice to my knowledge, was that horse and rider fell in —none too good for a man with one hand and threatened with asthma."

VII Corps Headquarters consisted of a group of huts, and were the scene on the night of February 16th/17th

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of what was probably the most concentrated bombing raid of the War.

Of this famous raid an officer of the VII Corps Staff writes as follows:

"The mess dining-room was a plain Nissen hut with a barrack table. About 7.30 p.m., just as we began our meal, there was an ominous crash, which made everything on the table jump. Thereafter crashes big and small continued at brief intervals until about 12.45 a.m. General Congreve did not appear to notice anything, and carried on conversation as comfortably as if he had been in a London club. Crash after crash continued; each time everything on the table jumped, and by the coffee stage the whole table was covered with salt, pepper, tobacco ash, and dust; yet the General maintained his calm, while the rest of us pictured an early transition to a better life!"

There happened to be a distinguished visitor dining with the Corps Commander that night who found his brief experience of life at a Corps Headquarters quite sufficiently exciting. "Early next morning," the same Staff Officer writes, "the distinguished visitor asked me for a car; I enquired where he wanted to go to; his programme indicated a south-easterly journey, but that car disappeared towards Boulogne in a cloud of dust!"

Continuing, the same Staff Officer writes:

"A striking feature of the night was the gallantry of our Acting Camp Commandant, Brigadier-General Law,[1] a man of sixty, who walked about the whole time cheering people up and directing what there was to be done. From time to time he would come to me, amid the crashes, click his heels and report the total casualties."

In all some two hundred and thirty bombs were dropped, and it is astonishing that more damage was not done, the total casualties reaching a no higher figure than twenty-two.

[1] Now Brigadier-General R. T. H. Law, C.B.

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As the end of March approached von Ludendorff's plans were completed. Thanks to the withdrawal of so many Divisions from the Russian, Italian, and other quiet theatres, the German High Command had been able to accumulate in the west a mass of Divisions surplus to those needed for the holding of the line, a condition of affairs which had made the resting and training of tired troops in the back areas an easy matter.

On March 21st von Ludendorff launched an attack with vastly superior forces upon the whole front of the British Fifth Army and part of the Third, while, by dummy works and other measures, he simulated attacks on distant sectors of the Allied front, thus producing a feeling of doubt as to where his main blow was to fall, which was calculated to cause much delay in the movement of the sparse reserves—and they were very sparse—at the disposal of the French and British Commanders-in-Chief. So terrific an onslaught had not yet been seen in the Great War, and before it the thin British line staggered and bent, the fighting everywhere rapidly assuming the character of a most desperate rearguard action in which, though the attackers were forced to pay a high price for their successes, the defenders lost very heavily in men and in material.

From the opening of the struggle the VII Corps [1] was involved in most fierce fighting, as von Marwitz strove with all the forces at his command to drive a wedge between the Fifth and Third British Armies.

It is most unfortunate that Congreve's Diary covering this very highly critical period should have been lost, for in it we should have been given a very vivid picture of the countless reports, alarmist and otherwise, which poured in on a harassed Corps Commander. We should have been shown how swiftly a Commander had to make

[1] In the line from right to left were the 16th, 21st, and 9th Divisions. The 39th was in Reserve, and the 35th arrived from Ypres on March 24th.

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up his mind and act on the strength of information of a most conflicting character, much of which was out of date long before it reached Corps Headquarters, so dislocated was the service of inter-communication amid the general confusion. We should have realised too how meagre were the resources with which to meet the urgent—and yet more urgent—appeals for help.

The picture we have of Sir Walter Congreve at this time from other sources is that of a man calm, collected, cheerful, resourceful, now filling a dangerous gap with the most scanty means, now collecting to meet some emergency a disorganised mass of reinforcing drafts, now forming into a fighting unit all the men returning off leave.

In his letters to his mother he never fails to maintain an unbounded confidence in the successful issue of the War, and he stoutly proclaims his own good health, though his Staff regarded him as being none too well.

"*March 27th.*—I have had a tough time, very little bed (and not too much washing!). But I am exceedingly well, and I find an average of three hours' sleep in twenty-four does me quite well. . . . I don't feel a bit depressed by this blow of the Boche on us, and no one hereabouts seems to be, but I expect, and very naturally, that it is otherwise in England. If it can stop where it is now little harm will have been done, but it is going to take some stopping yet I expect, for the Boche will exploit it all he knows.

"*P.S.*—I *know* we shall beat the Boche, though it may take years to do it."

"*March 28th.*—I am having an easier day so far, and did seven hours in bed and a bath and hair-cut this a.m., so it is all most peaceful again. I doubt it so remaining long, for generally directly I think myself easier a fresh storm blows up, and I think now I smell one brewing. . . . We shall win yet, you see."

"*March 30th.*—No twenty-four hours passes without half a dozen scares, involving the preparation of plans for all sorts of movements offensive and defensive."

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Early in April the share of the VII Corps in these memorable events was brought to a close,[1] and in letters to his mother Congreve wrote:

"*April 2nd.*—My Corps is to be relieved within the next two or three days and go back behind. A great nuisance, for the only way to make time go out here is to be busy, and I shall have now nothing to do. The battle is at a standstill in my immediate front, though no one can say how long it will remain so, and I should have liked to stay to see it finish."

"*April 6th.*—I am waiting now to hand over the Command of this part of the battle to the incoming Corps, and at noon I go off to the back area. It will be dull there after the stir of the last three weeks, and I hate to go now while the battle is still raging, but I have had my share of it, and it can hardly be so violent or critical as it has been, so I try to console myself. All the same, I am sorry to come away. On the whole we have held our own and inflicted heavy losses on the Bosches. It has rained heavily, which has made all things rather depressing, but I fancy it must be more so for the Bosche, as he has less accommodation than we have and has to move more."

Congreve did not remain long with the VII Corps in the back area, but was transferred to the Command of the X Corps, which was resting near Crécy, in which position his part in the Great War came to an end, as the following letter, written from G.H.Q. and dated May 16th, shows:

"I have just been told that as they are reducing establishments out here they desire me to return home, so I shall be back probably within a week, and I suppose I am hardly likely to do any more soldiering. I am here to try to find why I have been selected for this honour, and so far have elicited nothing beyond that, as I have once been severely wounded, I am more likely than another to break down under any great strain. Of course I think it is all nonsense, but I am not likely to get anything more."

[1] The VII Corps had incurred 25,000 casualties.

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He ends up on the usual brave note: "I am very well." Nonetheless, those who saw most of him at this time are agreed—and their opinion is entitled to acceptance—that he was far from well. The fact was that the shock of Billy's death, his own attack of cholera, his severe wound, and the anxious time through which he had recently passed when commanding the VII Corps had told upon him, as indeed would have been the case with a far stronger man.

It must be admitted therefore that the Commander-in-Chief had reasonable grounds for fearing that Congreve would not prove equal to the intense strain which might be thrown upon a Corps Commander at any moment, the strain, for instance, which fell on officers commanding Corps from the beginning of August 1918 until the Armistice.

To complete this brief sketch of Sir Walter Congreve as a Corps Commander it is only necessary to add two appreciations of him, written in the one case by the same Divisional Commander who has been already mentioned, and in the second by the Army Commander under whom Congreve commanded a Corps for a longer period than under any other.

After referring to Walter Congreve's complete indifference to danger and to his incessant struggle with indifferent health, the Divisional Commander in question writes:

"He never 'went back' on his subordinates, and they would therefore carry on in complete confidence that their efforts would be backed up, provided only that they themselves played the game. I had a striking personal experience of this when the Division which I commanded had the misfortune to lose a village in the front line. We were in the midst of a relief, our Artillery was not in, the place was a horrible little salient which had never been consolidated, and there were various other excellent reasons (or excuses) for its loss. But there was a con-

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siderable stir about it in England. The Press said that it was the first piece of ground lost since the opening of the Somme Battle a year before. G.H.Q. said it must be retaken.

"We had already tried to retake it with an immediate counter-attack and had failed. It was, as I have said, a most awkward salient in our line, and I was entirely against trying again. We should only have been blown out of the village by the Boche guns even had we succeeded in retaking it. Many Corps Commanders would have passed on G.H.Q.'s and the Army's order to counter-attack again, and would have made us do it. Not so Squibs.[1] He knew the ground from personal reconnaissance. He knew also that we had done our best in a very indifferent position. He entirely backed me up, and we did not counter-attack again. And what's more, I wasn't sent to England over it!"

Small wonder that Walter Congreve was well served.

Finally, there is an appreciation written by Lord Horne from the point of view as an Army Commander:

"He was a very fine fellow. Brave to a fault, ready and anxious to share with his officers and men all their hardships and dangers. A loyal man with a great sense of duty. Always to be depended upon and a staunch friend. I cannot better sum up his characteristics than by saying that Walter Congreve was an inspiring Commander, a gallant officer, and a very great and lovable gentleman."

[1] *Vide* p. 16.

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CHAPTER XIV

G.O.C. IN PALESTINE AND EGYPT

SIR WALTER CONGREVE remained at home on half-pay until August of the following year, 1919, when he went to Palestine, on appointment as Commander of the North Force of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. His Command comprised an Infantry Division, a Cavalry Brigade, and a few other troops with Headquarters at Haifa. In this capacity Congreve was directly under Lord Allenby, who was then High Commissioner for Egypt and Commander-in-Chief of all troops in Egypt and Syria, including Palestine.

Two months later Congreve became G.O.C. Egyptian Expeditionary Force. That is to say, he commanded all troops in Egypt and in Palestine, excepting only the Egyptian Army. He was still directly under Lord Allenby as Commander-in-Chief. He had approximately one Division in Palestine and one Division in Egypt, both scattered in a number of detachments. His Headquarters were at Cairo.

In 1920 Congreve's position became to some extent altered by the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as High Commissioner in Palestine, which country thus became a separate entity, for which the G.O.C., E.E.F., was still called upon to provide the necessary troops.

The principal tasks which faced Sir Walter Congreve on arrival in Palestine were firstly, the withdrawal of our troops from Syria under the Mandatory clauses of the Peace of Versailles, and secondly, the maintenance of order in Egypt and Palestine with the minimum of troops.

In withdrawing our troops from Syria and in handing

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over the country thus evacuated to the French, Congreve had a very delicate and difficult task to perform, for the period was one of extreme political tension in view of very possible friction between the French and the Arabs.

"No one," writes a member of his Staff, "could have handled the situation better than he did. A perfectly straightforward soldier, he never allowed himself to be led away from purely military considerations by all the political froth that was bubbling about him. He was quite clear and quite decided, and never got worried over the undoubtedly very difficult situation."

It must be added that the difficulties, which were great, would have been far greater had it not been for the very friendly relations established by Congreve between himself and the French Commander, General Gouraud, who, curiously enough, had also lost an arm in the Great War.

As a mark of his esteem General Gouraud gave to Sir Walter Congreve a silver combination knife and fork such as he used himself. On the death of Sir Walter Congreve, the knife and fork were returned to the donor by Lady Congreve, who received the following charming letter from General Gouraud:

"I little thought when I gave this fork to the General that I should see it again so quickly. I shall keep it as a cherished and precious souvenir, for which I thank you most sincerely. I saw enough of the General in Cairo and Syria to appreciate the nobility of his character, his high attainments as a General and as an officer. The responsibilities of his position and the perils of the War of which he bore such glorious traces had not lessened his energy and his light-heartedness. Of this I could not wish for a better proof than the voyage which he made in a very small fishing-boat with his son Geoffrey

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from Cyprus to Syria.[1] I shall always remember him as one of the most gallant of soldiers, and as one of the most splendid of those splendid gentlemen of whom old England is so justly proud."

How admirably Sir Walter Congreve was fitted to fill the post which he occupied is shown in the following letter from Lord Allenby:

"In reply to your letter of the 15th inst., asking me to send you a few lines about my old friend, Sir Walter Congreve:

"His work in Palestine covered a difficult period—after the cessation of recognised hostilities—when the conquered territories were still in a condition of agitation and of disquiet, throughout an area extending from west of the Taurus Mountains, to east of the River Euphrates.

"The situation demanded courage, skill, tact, and judgment; and we were happy in having, there, Walter Congreve, who possessed all these requisite qualities.

"When the time came to hand over the occupied enemy territory, in Syria and Cilicia, to the Mandatory Power, it was only the calm confidence, the firm decision, the wisdom, and the loyalty of Walter Congreve that enabled the withdrawal of the British troops of occupation to be effected in peace.

"In Egypt, his command was marked by strength combined with sympathetic kindness. He and I were always in complete accord; and, in difficult and dangerous days, I was ever sure of support and counsel from a friend on whom I could rely."

Further testimony to the same effect is borne by Sir Herbert Samuel, who writes:

"When I arrived in Palestine in July 1920 to establish a civil administration in succession to the military,

[1] In 1920 Sir Walter Congreve, with his son Geoffrey, one servant, and a crew of three sailed in a small fishing-boat from Cyprus to Beyrout. Very rough weather was encountered, which proved too much for all on board excepting only Sir Walter Congreve, who alone escaped sea-sickness.

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Sir Walter Congreve was the General in Command of the troops there as well as in Egypt. The country was in a somewhat disturbed state. The political situation was delicate, and the military factor was important. It was essential that the civil and military authorities should work closely together. Harmonious co-operation in such cases is a question of mutual confidence, and that in turn depends, in no small degree, upon personal qualities. I was fortunate in having as my colleague a man who was as staunch as a rock, who could be relied upon to act with vigour when action was necessary, and—not less important—to abstain from action when that was the course required by the occasion. During the whole time that the forces in the two countries remained under the single command, there was never a case of friction, never a cause for complaint, or even for criticism. I felt when Congreve died that the Empire had lost in him a servant of devoted loyalty, of strong personality, of prudent judgment. Those are great qualities. We should be grateful to those who bring them as offerings to the common stock."

From a number of private letters written by the late Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, then C.I.G.S., to Sir Walter Congreve it is abundantly clear that the value of his work in Egypt and Palestine was thoroughly appreciated by the Army Council. His relations with the C.I.G.S. were particularly happy ones, for they were life-long friends and very regular correspondents, in which connection Congreve's note on a letter from Henry Wilson dated May 29th, 1922, is of tragic interest:

"His last letter to me. He was murdered June 23rd at his own door."

To Sir Walter Congreve's qualities as a man at this time two members of his Staff bear eloquent testimony:

"Of his personal charm," writes one, "I don't think there is anything fresh that I can say. Everyone who came in contact with him felt it. It was quite impossible to work closely under him for long without loving the

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man and feeling the extraordinarily fine quality of his character. You knew at once that he had never been afraid of anything in his life, and had never done, said, or thought anything mean or ungenerous.

"He was very easy to work for, knew what he wanted, was quick to make up his mind, and quite decided about it, once it was made up. He never worried his Staff over details."

"What always struck one," writes the second officer, "was his absolute fearlessness, both physical and moral. It showed itself, not in bravado or in a swashbuckling attitude, of which I have seldom known a man so free, but in a firm and unruffled calmness. As an instance—on the day of Zaghlul's return to Cairo, the town was in a ferment of excitement, vast crowds had collected for the event, and the route down which he was to drive was lined ten deep with his followers, students, etc., etc. The troops had been confined to barracks in order to avoid possible collisions between them and the populace.

"To return from the Headquarter Offices to his house General Congreve had to cross 'the route,' and as he had come to the office as usual in uniform, his Staff and the police had made all sorts of preparations for a police escort. The General would have none of it; at the usual hour he left the office alone on foot, except for a couple of us who accompanied him, and with perfect unconcern and sangfroid made his way through the crowd and along the route to his usual turning. As a result the crowd made way for him, and I did not hear a single hostile remark; in fact, there were one or two faint cheers!"

As illustrating Sir Walter Congreve's insistence on the maintenance of an unruffled demeanour on this occasion, Lady Congreve writes:

"I asked him if I could go to Shepheard's Hotel to see the triumphant entry of Zaghlul; many people were going, but all more or less furtively, very quietly dressed, not in their own motors but in *arabiyehs*[1] or trams. He

[1] Native cab.

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said: 'Certainly, go if you like, but I won't have you slinking down as if you were afraid. If you go, you must go in your own car with your *khavass* (a magnificent gentleman in scarlet and gold) on the box, which I did. I had no trouble either."

"Other qualifications," continues the Staff Officer just quoted, "with which no one, who was brought into touch with General Congreve, could fail to be impressed, was his outstanding character and ideals as a soldier and a gentleman, and his unfailing loyalty.

"It was by daily intercourse with him, and by little things unimportant in themselves, that one learned to appreciate his lofty and unflinching character and the high ideals on which all his actions were based. It is not easy to adduce definite examples, but I think one incident is typical.

"Towards the end of 1920, at a time when a number of Indian units were returning to India, the strength of the garrison had been much reduced, and both in Egypt and Palestine the situation was such as to give considerable anxiety to the General in Command. Suddenly the situation in Constantinople became critical; General Congreve realised the difficulty that the Army Council was experiencing, with the many commitments they had, in putting their hands on reinforcements for Constantinople, and after careful consideration of the chances he was taking, wired to say that, if really required, he could spare an Infantry Brigade from Egypt."

In one other point, too, both the Staff Officers referred to are in agreement, and that is that a ride with Sir Walter Congreve was not likely to be devoid of incident.

"He was," writes one, "a desperate fellow to go out riding with; he seemed to delight in getting into difficulties and to prefer an increase in pace where the going was really bad. In one ride on the hills above Cairo I remember that a 'short cut' which he insisted on taking landed us on the roof of a house after a steep scramble down some rocks. Nothing put out, he found a heap of rubbish against one side of the house and jumped his

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horse down on to it. My wife and I hated it, but we had to follow. He then proceeded at a fast canter along a stone-paved street with tram-lines, trams, etc. That was our worst ride, but on many other occasions he would choose the most horrible going, rocks, holes or ditches to go fast over."

The second officer writes:

"His riding was, of course, proverbial. With only one hand available for the reins he would make his way across the cultivations, taking the water channels as they came, or up and down the stony hills near Cairo at a pace that kept one's heart in one's mouth when riding with him."

Those who rode with Sir Walter Congreve may well have exclaimed, as did Chaplain Gumble after a desperate all-night gallop with George Monk over ice-covered Tweedside roads in December 1660: "It was God's infinite mercy we had not our necks broke." [1]

In the spring of 1923 Sir Walter Congreve's appointment expired, and to his great regret, for his work had been most congenial; he had been in complete agreement with his two Chiefs, and his health had much benefited from the climate of Palestine and Egypt. His own regrets were shared by Lord Allenby and Sir Herbert Samuel and, it may be added, by many officers—and their name was legion—who had enjoyed the hospitality so freely extended to them by Sir Walter and Lady Congreve at their house in Cairo.

[1] Gumble's *Life of Monk*, p. 161.

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CHAPTER XV

GOVERNOR OF MALTA

ON his arrival in England Sir Walter Congreve took up at once the duties of G.O.C.-in-C. Southern Command, with his Headquarters at Salisbury. He was now a full General, and also Colonel-Commandant 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade. This latter appointment gave him particular pleasure, and he took the keenest interest in the doings of his Battalion, and invariably wore the mess kit of his Regiment when dining out with any unit in his Command. His old College at Oxford, too, had shown its recognition of his services by making him an Honorary Fellow, a graceful compliment which Sir Walter Congreve much appreciated.

The climate of Salisbury proved the reverse of beneficial, and after holding the Command for a little more than a year Congreve took the opportunity which then presented itself of succeeding Field-Marshal Lord Plumer as Governor of Malta and its Dependencies. This step, however, he took with very great regret and after much anxious thought, for the Governorship of Malta is usually associated with the final chapter of a soldier's career.

He took over his new duties in Malta on June 29th, 1925.

During his Governorship it did not fall to his lot to make any weighty decisions. Self-government had already been given to the Maltese, and the new Governor was only called upon to work a system which was already in running order. From time to time minor questions arose as to procedure and powers, etc., but no great question of policy.

Sir Walter Congreve maintained a strict impartiality

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in matters political. He exerted his influence in matters such as the preservation of a proper decorum in debate and of a due respect for the Chair. To his efforts in these directions his Diary, available again after a lapse of nine years, bears witness.

"Spoke to Ministers on the bad effect of personalities in Parliament, and exhorted them when attacked to appeal to the Speaker."

Similarly in the smaller field of sport he lost no opportunity of displaying his respect for constituted authority.

On one occasion he attended a football match, in which one side "displayed," he writes, "an inability to accept the referee's decision, which ended by one of them kicking the ball off the ground; so I left, and did not present medals to the winners."

On another day he was present at an Annual Regatta, in respect of which he writes:

"After the last race I had to present the prizes. The noise and disputing was terrific, and one crew got to such an argument with the Umpire—and was gradually getting on board—that I intervened, and had them put off by the police! Last year's race is still undecided because the Umpire's award was disputed and the whole matter taken into Court, the Umpire being one of the litigants! I really believe that the same might have happened this year too had I not taken action. As it was, the prizes got presented and I saw no fights."

Among other matters in which Sir Walter Congreve was able to exercise influence were the feeding of necessitous school-children and the Boy Scout and Girl Guide Movements, in which Lady Congreve also took a keen interest.

To further the development of the Boy Scout and Girl Guide Movements Sir Walter Congreve enlisted the support of the parish priests, about whom he writes:

"*July 27th,* 1924.—I am told that the poorer clergy here (many benefices are worth no more than £12 a

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year) are called Riflemen, because their poor clothes get so green. I hope that they are worthy of the name, for an angel would be benefited by it."

"*February 2nd,* 1925, *Candlemas Day.*—At 10 a.m. about sixty parish priests arrived, each tendering a candle to me as Governor, a custom from the time of the Knights. I had to make them a speech, which I devoted to inciting them to help Boy Scouting and Girl Guiding. They took it all pretty well, and then they had refreshments and left. I keep the biggest and best candle, and the others are sent to the churches."

On Candlemas Day in the following year Sir Walter Congreve asked the parish priests again for their assistance in the same direction. He also added an appeal on behalf of the migratory birds, which were annually much persecuted during the brief halt which they made on the Island for rest, such slaughter, especially of the less common hawks, being very distressing to so knowledgeable a naturalist.

To gain a personal knowledge at first hand of the general conditions prevailing in the Island the Governor, often accompanied by Lady Congreve, went for long walks, during which occasionally there was something humorous to record.

"*September 2nd,* 1924.—Went to Tigne. A lot of ladies bathing in very scanty garments and no dressing-gowns. I am told the bathing place is called 'The pool of disillusionment'!"

"*March 16th,* 1926.—On arriving at a public building which the Governor wished to inspect, a somewhat alarming message was received from the Custodian. "He sent us, pencilled on his card, 'I have a little small-pox.' He eventually came out, and we gathered that it was no worse than vaccination."

After a walk to the harbour the Diary entry for September 20th, 1924, ends: "An American yacht has

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arrived, and contains 'owner, two nurses, two secretaries, three valets,' a strange assortment."

During these long walks Sir Walter Congreve became well-known by sight to a very large number of Maltese, for there was no mistaking the tall, spare figure with the handsome face and the iron hook projecting from the empty left sleeve, followed as he almost invariably was by his two Dachshunds, Ingi and Axel, whose frequent loss and recovery are so often recorded in the Diary.

In some respects Sir Walter Congreve was a very unconventional Governor, as the following extracts from his Diary show:

"*July 10th,* 1924.—Went a walk to see the sea, and met our two small friends of the former day, Tomasso and Salvadore, both of whom talk fair English, and are very pleasant people. We walked home with them and the sheep they tend to Dinghli where they live, and were introduced to their mother. They all, together with chickens, rabbits, dog, donkey, and goats, seem to live in three rooms without any windows or ventilation, but they were very hospitable and well mannered, like our own country folk, in fact."

"*July 28th,* 1924.—Salvadore came with me and was very agreeable. When I was sitting down after a steep climb he said, 'You sing?' 'No, indeed, I don't!' 'I have a sing.' 'Well, sing it,' and after several attempts he began on 'God Save the King,' so I joined in, and we ended with three cheers for him, and I came away refreshed, but I wondered what some Governors would think of it!"

"*February 10th,* 1925.—Went out with the dogs before breakfast. Met a man trying to see the Armoury, but as it is a public holiday, it was closed. Took him in and showed him round and gave him breakfast. He turned out to be one of our Embassy at Rome."

A new tennis court was under construction at Verdala Palace, and Congreve admired very much both the skill of the workmen and the energy with which they worked.

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When their task was completed he invited them all to dine at the Palace.

"*October 19th*, 1924.—Had the workmen on the tennis court to dinner at 11 a.m. They chose Sunday, as they have to fast on Saturday. Nine out of the eleven came."

Unconventional as Sir Walter Congreve might be in matters relating to himself as a man, he held strictly to the ceremonial marks of respect due to the Governor as representing H.M. the King. The procedure for displaying these marks of respect had been handed down to him by his predecessors, and would be handed on by him in turn undiminished to his successor.

"To office and then returned Admiral ——'s call by going on board the ——, where for the first time the band did not play the National Anthem, and I later got a letter from the C.-in-C. of the Fleet enclosing an Admiralty letter saying the K.R. prohibits it. Since when I wonder, and I must find out, for our K.R. says it is to be played for Governors!"

Sir Walter and Lady Congreve were hospitality itself, such a thing as having a meal to themselves being so extraordinarily rare as to merit a record in the Diary. In addition to those who, living in Malta, might be said to have a claim on the hospitality of the Governor and his wife, there was also a steady stream of visitors from home, who arrived bearing letters of introduction from mutual friends. The number of these visitors was at times considerable, as the following Diary entry—and others like it—testify:

"Eighteen to lunch, mostly those whom we have been asked to be 'kind to.'"

Occasionally such a visitor was found to be "dull." This was unpardonable, and a black mark was made against the person at home responsible for the introduction, and not without reason, for it required a very dull

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guest not to be able to find some one subject in common with a host whose many and varied interests in life made him so delightful a companion.

Sir Walter Congreve probably derived more real pleasure from entertaining young people than any other form of guest. He loved being with young people, and in their company was the most light-hearted of them all. To this charming trait in his character all who knew him well can bear witness, as does the Diary entry for December 14th, 1924, which enumerates the guests at dinner, and ends by recalling that after dinner "we hunted an aniseed stocking through the Public Gardens," aided, no doubt, by Axel and Ingi.

Sir Walter Congreve greatly appreciated the opportunities which his post at Malta afforded him for watching the work of the Navy at close quarters, and he thoroughly enjoyed being with the Fleet during manœuvres and fleet firing, as the guest of the C.-in-C. of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Thanks to the help so readily given by the Navy, Congreve was able to organise some very interesting operations in the spring of 1925, involving the co-operation of the Navy, Army, and Air Force, and culminating in the successful disembarkation of an invading force with its guns, horses, and lorries. This exercise formed a welcome relief from the ordinary training carried out by the Garrison of Malta, a training which, owing to the restricted area available, is apt to be somewhat monotonous.

A well-informed antiquarian, Sir Walter Congreve found much to interest him in Malta and at places within easy reach of the Island on the Mediterranean littoral, as several entries in his Diary show.

"*January 6th*, 1925.—With Professor Zammit to see Tarxien and the Hypogeum, both very wonderful productions of 4,000 B.C., and all done with flint implements. Many of the stones are carved with designs we cannot beat now; several have very good carvings of goats and

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oxen. The fitting of the great stones and the shaping of their curves is, too, extraordinarily good."

"*November 28th,* 1925.—With Professor Despot to see the cave whence they have taken all the prehistoric bones, and a very wonderful place it is, and the best proof of the enormous age of the world I have ever seen or heard of, for the bones are in many cases lying under very thick deposits of stalagmite, which is incredibly slow of formation. The theory is that a river ran where the cave now is, and that these bones of elephants, hippos, rhinos, stags, and a heap of other great animals were washed in by heavy floods in some wet period of the world's history, when Malta was part of the African continent."

In May 1925 Sir Walter and Lady Congreve visited Tripoli as the guests of Major and Lady Annabel Dodds at the British Consulate. A call was made at once on Count Volpi, the distinguished Governor of Tripoli. The Count, a striking figure "in khaki uniform with gold epaulettes and turned-up trousers and spats," was kindness itself to the visitors. The Diary entry for May 12th runs:

"Volpi is a rich Venetian banker, and has been for three and a half years Governor here. When he came no white man could go two miles outside the town. Now you can go some hundreds of kilometres in every direction, and all is quiet and orderly. The town when he came was entirely native, the port open, and the castle and walls in ruins. He has built a breakwater, which makes a fine harbour, wharves and warehouses, some miles of sea wall and broad esplanades, a tobacco factory, an hotel, and streets of shops. He has recovered and restored the castle and walls, and is building houses for his offices and officials, and it is, I am told, the same all through the country, and all done out of the country itself, so the Countess told me! After lunch Volpi took us all round the town and showed us over the castle and tobacco factory and all his other works, and we were accompanied by bicycle orderlies and African orderlies

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with flags and much state, without which he never moves."

"*May 16th*, 1925.—Left at 8 a.m. in two motors for Homs, seventy miles east . . . remains of Roman works everywhere and some of their olive-trees are still alive. Homs is a small place, and like Tripoli surrounded by a high wall made by the Italians. Went straight to Leptis, the old Roman city which the Italians are digging out of the sand. They have already unearthed some very fine work of marble, pillars, and statues. It must have been a large town, and seems to have been largely built of marble. Its style is much the same as Baalbek in Syria, which was built at the same date. It was all very interesting, but makes one sad to see such destruction of beautiful work. Nothing but an earthquake could have done it. The sand has so preserved the stone that now it is coming out as fresh as when it was covered 1,600 years ago."

In the autumn of the same year a visit was made to Tunis for the purpose of seeing Carthage.

"*August 28th*.—Out to Carthage with the Consul, and lunched at his little villa on the shore. In evening went all over the sights of the city, of which practically nothing is left except what is in the museum in Tunis and at Carthage, where Le Père Laitre showed us round, an antiquary of world-wide renown and a very charming old man."

Amongst Sir Walter Congreve's many hobbies was, as has been before noticed, the study of ecclesiastical architecture, which took him to many churches of interest in Malta. On such occasions it was advisable that whoever took the Governor round should be sure of his facts, for Congreve's knowledge of the subject was very considerable, and if a misstatement was made it would hardly pass unnoticed. After one such visit the Diary entry concludes as follows:

"Curious how little some of the priests know of the

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history of their own church. To-day one told me it was 600 years old and it manifestly was not more than 250."

Sir Walter Congreve's interest in matters ecclesiastical was by no means limited to architecture, for he was, as his Diary shows, the most regular of regular churchgoers. To such a man certain modern tendencies could not fail to be a cause for anxiety. In this connection he writes:

"*May 18th,* 1926.—Saw new Canon of Cathedral, Rev. Marshall, who seems full of ideas to stir up the church life here, and I hope he may succeed. I am afraid it is entirely a personal matter in these days, and that there is little of the old spirit which took people to church whether they liked it or not. Now most people regard it as they do the cinema or theatre; because religion is gone out of our lives and looked at from a purely material point of view, it is a great loss to our national character and well-being."

Congreve took full advantage at Malta of the facilities existing for sailing, a sport of which he had become exceedingly fond. He therefore lost no time in joining the Yacht Club, and within a week of landing had bought the dinghy *Kittiwake,* for which he paid £28. Handicapped as he was by the loss of his left hand, he nonetheless had his fair share of success in racing, had many adventures, and most thoroughly enjoyed himself. Once at least he had to swim for it, as his Diary records.

"*September 2nd,* 1924.—Sailed with Anthony Nugent [1] as crew. Had a strong wind, and Nightingale had set our sail a foot high. In gibing just after starting the boat broached to and filled, and we had to be rescued by a *dghaisa.*"

The two following entries are typical:

[1] Now Sub-Lieutenant Anthony Burnell Nugent, R.N.

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"*December 20th*, 1924.—Sailed in p.m., a good breeze. We got aground in Sleima Creek when leading, and were put third, and remained so with a lot of water in us until, having baled out with a tin procured from a *dghaisa* we passed *Cormorant* and were catching *Hawk*; then *Cormorant* luffed us about and got ahead and put us out of any chance of catching *Hawk*. But we were beating *Cormorant* again until, luffing up to avoid a heavy gust, the tiller slipped from under my arm and put us into irons, and by the time we had got sailing again we were beaten and came in third, three seconds after second. A mixture of bad luck and bad workmanship, but a splendid race."

"*April 17th*, 1925.—Sailed *Kittiwake* with Ida, and had a very eventful sail, only five boats out and only three completed. We got thrown ashore before the start, then were run into by a naval picket-boat. Shipped much water; nearly charged a buoy; had two involuntary gibes; and came in five seconds behind Cardew, after a great race and both of us wet through.

Later on Congreve bought a larger boat, the *Badger*. In this he had an exciting experience with his two sons, both of whom were with him off and on during his time in Malta.

"*May 29th*, 1926.—With Geoff. and Xty[1] in *Badger* to Comino, a long beat of 6½ hours, a strong wind and a considerable sea. We anchored inside Cominotto, when wind went straight north and blew harder and harder, so much so that we were very anxious about our anchor holding, for rocks were close all round us. Xty kept 1st watch, and about 9 p.m. *dghaisa* came in and asked if they could do anything for us, so we asked for the loan of an anchor, but they had none and vanished into the night. At twelve they returned with an anchor and reeved it out and altered our position farther north, after which we felt secure, and all bedded down and slept fitfully."

"*May 30th*.—Our friends returned at seven and got up their anchor. We got under weigh at nine and went back to Valetta by the west and south sides of the Island . . . we did not get in until five, and all very wet."

[1] His youngest son Christopher, now in the Rifle Brigade.

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Such exposure and fatigue was not good for an asthmatic man whose health had been giving cause for anxiety for some months past and who had recorded in his Diary but three weeks ago that he felt more asthmatic than he had done for twenty years. The Diary entry of two days' later will therefore not come as a surprise.

"*June 1st.*—Out to Verdala and straight to bed with bronchitis and asthma, and remained in bed until June 18th."

He was soon out and about, but, depending as he did for such sleep as he could obtain sitting upright throughout the night, he found an ever-increasing difficulty in carrying on his work, as his Diary shows.

On July 9th Sir Walter and Lady Congreve left Malta for Naples *en route* to Cutigliano in the hills, about forty-five miles from Florence, where the climate was said to be beneficial to asthmatic patients. It is clear from the Diary that the results were disappointing, and on August 5th the return journey was begun, two days being spent in Florence. In spite of ill-health a ray of humour is to be found now and again in the Diary, as for instance the remark of the lady's maid who, on being asked what she thought of the wonderful portraits in the Pitti Galleries, replied: "They seem a bit old-fashioned." Again, in regard to a visit to a theatre, where it was obvious that the visitors were not the only occupants of the stalls, the Diary entry concludes:

"Caught a flea as big as a lark."

A day was spent in Rome, and then the journey was resumed, Malta being reached on August 11th.

The Italian trip ended badly, for the next Diary entry is dated November 13th and runs:

"*November 13th.*—Landed on August 11th about 8.30. Ministers met us, and I took over the government again. Very seedy all day, and began a bad illness of pneumonia, bronchitis and asthma which kept me at death's door for a week and in bed for two months,"

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and then he adds—surely a very wonderful instance of the supremacy of mind over matter—"It was a very horrible time, but I did all the essentials of my work all the time, and never was unconscious or unable to write and read."

The remainder of the Diary is pathetic reading, telling as it does of a constant and most gallant struggle to carry out his engagements under conditions which would have daunted a less resolute man.

Gradually the daily programme had to be curtailed, as can be seen from the Diary entry of December 2nd:

"Opera has been our only evening outing, and we have had few to meals. I have been asthmatic all the time and unable to do much."

At last the opera, too, had to be given up, a very grievous deprivation to one who was so fond of music.

With the advent of the New Year, 1927, matters went from bad to worse, first grave heart trouble and then dropsy supervening. An accumulation of ills accompanied by much suffering and borne without a murmur or vestige of complaint.

On February 14th Sir Walter Congreve was moved to Imtarfa Hospital, where it was hoped that some benefit might be obtained by a complete rest. The results, however, did not answer expectations, and on the morning of the last day in February it was clear that the end could only be a question of a few hours. Sir Walter Congreve himself had no delusions, for that morning he said to his Nursing Sister, with his usual charming smile: "I know I am going to die to-day, for you have not thought it necessary to wash me." Nonetheless, he insisted in writing with his own hand a letter—of some length—to H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught.

"I have stood," wrote his doctor, "by many a death-bed, but such a spirit in a dying man I have never seen before."

The letter to the Duke of Connaught began:

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"I think it so good of you to have written personally about me that I decided to make an effort to answer you myself, but it will, I fear, be a very poor result." After telling of his critical illness of the previous autumn and of his present situation, the writer goes on to say:

"I am assured, that is, if I keep still in bed and leave the heart entire freedom from worry, that it will gradually recover and leave me able to do my work, provided I take it easy and never attempt to walk uphill. They (the doctors) in short promise I shall be able to complete my time here, that is another 2½ years, if I will be careful, . . Doctors are very confident I shall do it, but nothing but the test itself is of any value. I will do my best, and can do no more. . . .

"The R.A.M.C. people here are as splendid as they were during the War, and no one could say more. And so, Sir, I must say good-bye. I hope I may again see you doing all things well, as you always do. If I don't, you will remember there is a great affection waiting for you on beyond. With every possible good wish to you, Sir

"I am, Your, etc."

Late that evening Sir Walter Congreve asked for the writing rest that he used when in bed and wrote a long letter to his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Geoffrey Congreve.[1] He completed the letter about 10.30 and passed peacefully away half an hour afterwards.

Amid every sign of public and private respect and regret, the body of Sir Walter Congreve was borne out to sea and committed to the deep between the mainland and the Island of Filfola beneath the waters on which he had spent so happily the bulk of his spare time while at Malta. A stone erected at a point on the coastline by the people of Malta to the memory of their late Governor now overlooks the Island of Filfola and the spot beneath which his body lies.

[1] Now Lady Congreve, a Baronetage having been conferred upon her husband in recognition of his father's distinguished services.

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SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF HIS EXCELLENCY
SIR WALTER NORRIS CONGREVE
GOVERNOR OF MALTA
BURIED AT SEA ON THE 4TH MARCH 1927
BETWEEN THIS SPOT AND FILFLA ISLAND

MEMORIAL STONE ERECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF MALTA

"He was a great and humble man"
Professor Bartolo at the Unveiling Ceremony
September 13th, 1928

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In view of the fact that he had completed but half of the five years allotted to Governors, his hold on the affections of the Maltese people was very remarkable.

The secret of his success lay, said the *Malta Chronicle,* in his absolute straightforwardness and love of fair play; in his accessibility to all classes on the Island; to his many acts of unostentatious kindness; to his strong sense of duty, and last, but not least, to his "broad-minded toleration of other people's views and consideration for their feelings."

"No more touching proof of his consideration for the people and their interests," wrote the *Chronicle,* "could be afforded than his strict injunctions, even on his deathbed, that neither his illness nor his death, which he felt to be approaching, should be allowed to interfere with the Carnival celebrations or other entertainments, including those fixed to take place in his own Palace at Valetta, because he repeatedly said it would be 'bad for trade,' and would deprive the people of their festivities. So strongly did he feel on this point that the cancellation of the balls that were to have taken place on Tuesday and Wednesday of last week was decided upon against his wish, and, as His Excellency insisted on reading the *Chronicle* right through every day, we had to print for him a special copy of the paper, omitting the announcement of the cancellation of the Palace balls as well as of the dance at the Casino Maltese and the Exchange, which had likewise been given up owing to his illness.

"It is no wonder, therefore," concluded the *Chronicle,* "that the people of Malta are in mourning to-day . . . while they deplore the loss of a kind benefactor, a true and tried friend, and a sincere well-wisher." [1]

Happy as were Sir Walter Congreve's relations with the people of Malta, no less fortunate was he in his association with the Members of the Government, as Sir

[1] The *Malta Chronicle,* March 2nd, 1927.

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Ugo Mifsud has testified. Speaking from his experience as Prime Minister, Sir Ugo Mifsud says:

"Sir Walter Congreve's advent amongst us had been preceded by his fame as a gallant soldier with a most brilliant military record and as the holder of the supreme award for bravery in the field. War heroes are not necessarily gifted with those qualities which endear them to their fellow-men. But Sir Walter Congreve was a characteristically English combination of the soldier and country gentleman with the best elements of each. He proved himself to be a man whose every word could be taken at its maximum worth, and whose every action was invariably prompted by the truest and sincerest of motives. Impulsive at times, he was ever a staunch upholder of principle, a model of straightforwardness and fair play, and above all a public servant imbued with a very high standard of sense of duty.

"Thus to all those who happened to be associated with him in the management of public affairs, it was such a privilege and a pleasure to work under him. He was an arch-enemy of any form of what are often called the necessary reservations of statesmanship and diplomacy sometimes essential for a public man, and an admirer of all that constituted candour and plain speaking, even if it might clash, not to say hopelessly jar, with his own personal views and feelings.

"General Congreve's military career has been quoted as a brilliant specimen of devotion to duty. Still, no better example of steadfast obedience to the call of public service can be instanced than that which moved him to devote to the end to the cause of the good government of Malta and the welfare of the Maltese inhabitants the last period of his existence. During those last months of his life, whilst in a physical condition which ought to have imposed upon him a well-earned and truly deserved rest, he personally attended meetings of the Executive Council, exhibiting no sign of suffering and in the best of humour and apparent good spirits.

"In his relations with his own Ministers he always added to his official connection a note of personal friendship coupled with charming ways and a sporting tem-

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perament. He trusted them implicitly, and they in turn responded by reciprocating his confidence in them by straightforward dealing and an affectionate devotion to his person. And even on those occasions when there was a case for strong divergence of personal opinion between them and the Governor, who constitutionally as Head of the Civil Government had perforce to take their political recommendation, or as Head of the Maltese Imperial Government could discard their ministerial advice, Sir Walter never failed to display towards them the kindliest regards and the best of feelings. We who have been his constitutional advisers shall ever remember among others a particular occasion when, during an Executive Council Meeting, the Governor on one side and Ministers on the other held strong conflicting views on a particular controversial point. The matter of course could not be brought to a head that day, and the sitting was adjourned. When the Council rose and whilst Ministers were making their way out from the Council Room to the adjoining chamber, Sir Walter turned to his private secretary and clerk to the Executive and said to him: 'They are all jolly good fellows.'

"In the intimacy of his private life many were those who had the privilege of knowing him; for, modest and unassuming to a fault, he was accessible to all classes. His simplicity of manners enabled him to mix freely with all, making a host of personal friends; his charitable disposition made him a friend of those in need. He will always be remembered along with Lady Congreve, his charming and tactful wife, as the initiator of the Children's Soup Kitchens in Malta, and as a great promoter and supporter of all the charities in these islands."

Finally, Sir Ugo Mifsud points out that by his decision to be buried in Maltese waters, Sir Walter Congreve established a further link between the people of the Islands and himself, and speaking of the memorial stone the Prime Minister says: "It is at this spot, opposite Filfola Island, that the beauty and simplicity of nature will ever remind us of this great and noble soul."

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CONCLUSION

It did not fall to the lot of Sir Walter Congreve to command an independent Army in the field, and so how he would have fared in that capacity can only be a matter for conjecture. Those, however, who were privileged to know him will agree that in character and in that perfect sanity which can differentiate between what is possible of accomplishment and what not, he possessed in a most remarkable degree two at least of the qualities—and those possibly the most important—required in a Commander-in-Chief in war. In him the British Empire lost a great public servant. He excelled, as an old friend has remarked, in being normal. He was a most perfect gentleman, with complete courage and common-sense and of unswerving loyalty. In the punctilious performance of "the trivial round, the common task," he set a wonderful example to the ordinary man in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. Withal a man of a large mind, utterly incapable of pettiness in any shape or form. Well might one who knew him intimately exclaim, on being told that his death would leave a gap: "It doesn't leave a gap—that is one in a row. It is a peak that is left empty."

FINIS

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PART II

BILLY CONGREVE

By

PAMELA FRASER

Dream not of him that he is safe, being dead.
He sought no safety, living free from fear;
Nor count him happy that the day is here
Which sets a garland on the victor's head.
Say not of him that never tears were shed
For brighter promise, certitude more clear
Of that supremacy which men hold dear:
Say rather, others followed where he led.

Say that with earnest eyes and will untiring
He sets another battle in array,
Always the same glad confidence inspiring,
Ever the foremost on the perilous way,
No other guerdon of the night desiring
Than fronting danger at the dawn of day.

H. V. MACNAGHTEN,
In the *Eton Chronicle.*

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I.—A MEMOIR

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(iii) Cameron.
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The identification of persons mentioned by Christian name (or nickname) in the following pages is given in footnotes in the case of Billy Congreve's family; in other cases, to save multiplicity of notes, the identification will be found in the index.

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CHAPTER I

A MEMOIR

"Billy's was the finest record of the War."—FIELD-MARSHAL SIR HENRY WILSON.

BILLY was born on March 22nd, 1891, at his grandfather's home, Burton Hall, Cheshire. Being the first grandchild, he was surrounded by aunts and uncles who thought and made much of him. They were like fairy godparents bringing gifts of love. As he grew and felt himself surrounded in this, he returned their affection easily, and developed thoughtful and endearing ways.

He could just remember being taken to India as a tiny boy, and the return to England and to Aldershot. They lived in a red brick villa, and he was sent to Miss Linton's day school at Farnborough. He learned to write a good round hand, and could express himself vividly in letters, even at that early age. His father and mother seemed all that was most lovely to him—his father, who took for granted one's difficult best, and his mother, who led like a will-o'-the-wisp among delicious thoughts and fancies. One morning Billy returned from Miss Linton's to find his mother with a bad headache. He lay down beside her, and presently remarked in mournful tones, "It's a *wary* world." His mother said, "Oh! darling, that's dreadful —I do hope you don't find it as sad as all that!" "When you're ill it's *wary*," he answered; "but when you're well it's *exwit*."

He lived there among soldiers and fairy stories—stern reality and happy imaginings. His Aunt Evelyne would come to stay, and there were evenings in front of the fire when their spirits would link hands and go roving among hobgoblins and elves. She told him tales of Grey Gown

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and the old Gnome, and afterwards put them into a book. She described such an evening, when, his parents out at some dinner-party, Billy would journey with her into Otherland and lose himself in enchantment until "Aunt's" voice would cease, and for the moment nothing would be heard but the flicker of the fire in the drawing-room of the little house on the edge of the Aldershot Common. . . .

"'Is the story done, Aunt?' said Billy.
'The story's done,' said Aunt.
'And did they all live happily ever after?' said Billy.
'They may be living happily still, for all I know,' said Aunt, 'in Otherland.'
'I wish Grey Gown and the old Gnome could have kept together for always and always,' said Billy.
'That kind of thing doesn't happen—not even in Otherland,' said Aunt; and the clock struck ten."

At the outbreak of the South African War they were still at Aldershot. During those three years Billy was at school at Summerfields, Oxford, and spent the holidays mostly at Burton. His grandfather died, and his father being absent at the war, Billy went to the funeral, and felt a tinge of responsibility at being the eldest son of the eldest son, for by now he had been presented with a younger brother Geoffrey. He listened to the "grown-ups" discussing family affairs and the proposed sale of Burton. He looked at family pictures, and heard family tales, not only of the little scarlet-coated boy in the Zoffany picture who invented the rocket, nor the blue-clad indelicate playwright, but of eccentric old great-aunts and of fortunes brought and lost to the Congreve family.

At luncheon one day the family were having a good gossip about most of their female acquaintances. Like all gossip, it was probably none too kind, for Billy presently laid down his knife and fork and remarked with a deep sigh: "It seems to me there's something wrong with *every* nice lady."

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He was growing among relations who, like his father, took one's best for granted. His grandmother set the Victorian standard of behaviour, which disallows the colour grey. She was a Spartan, who, when stone-blind in her last years, would find her way about the house unhelped, and pour tea over the tablecloth rather than relinquish her right as mistress of the house. Yet across this rigidity came moments when she would send reserve and convention tumbling helter-skelter, moments when on tip-toe she would hold up her face to be kissed on a sudden meeting in a passage; or, writing her Will, request that colours should be worn and marriage bells pealed at her funeral, since meeting her husband again would be happier than all her life.

News came to the family of Walter Congreve's gallantry at Colenso, and the award of the Victoria Cross. To Billy it was the summit of what he had always known his father to be.

Billy's tastes and inclination at that time were those of many English boys. He climbed like a monkey, and would sooner go adventuring up tree-tops and build a secret hut than play any game. He was always devoted to riding, and was a born horseman. From his mother especially came his great love of animals, and the affection he felt for various dogs and pets was quite as strong as that he felt for his human friends. In a letter written during the War he recalls his dachshund, "My beautiful Gimlet—do you remember him? Oh, I loved him so. I shall never have another dog like that: one oughtn't to get too fond of any animal. Their lives are so horridly short. I love animals. I think I'd sooner see any amount of human beings killed than one animal." Perhaps in his feeling for animals one finds the foundation of a quality which showed and grew in Billy from his earliest years, a blending of compassion and understanding.

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His playfellows during his holidays were Geoffrey (his brother) and Diana King (his cousin), both six years younger than himself. This made him an undisputed leader. He invented a whistle call to which the others must instantly respond by coming to him from the remotest corner. Diana would hide in terror, knowing only too well the dangers she would have to face and the exigencies demanded of her. Once she gave her scarlet knickers to Billy when he was in need of a pirate-flag to tie to the topmost bough of the tallest tree. That was in the summer, and the following November Grannie, walking in her garden, pointed out a strange red phenomenon flapping like a foreign bird among the skeleton branches of a tree.

Knights and dragons must have been in their games, since all his life he loved to think of knights, and after he was killed people compared him to a knight himself—his gallant gentleness. In *Realities of War,* Sir Philip Gibbs speaks of Billy as " Young Congreve, who was the beau ideal of knighthood. . . ." At Eton he hung upon his walls the picture by Pinturicchio of the Knight of Rhodes kneeling among flowery meads, and on the back of the frame he pasted a sheet of paper and copied in careful print the lines from Mallory which tell of Sir Parcyval:—

" And then he kneled doune and made his Prayer devoutely unto Almighty Jhesu for he was one of the best Knyghtes of the world that at that time was in whom the veray feythe stood most. . . . Right soone there came by the Holy vessel of the Sanc Greal with all maner of swetenes. . . . Syre Parcyval had a glimerynge of the vessel for he was a parfyte knyghte."

His youngest brother Christopher was born when Billy was twelve years old. Although the three brothers saw little of each other owing to school-going, and later to Billy joining the Army, they were splendid playfellows

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and devoted to each other. Again, in this relationship there showed strongly in Billy that quality of protectiveness. He was like a parent in his pride of them and in his laughter at them, and then he became a teasing brother in his games with them. Later, at Chartley, there were grand times hunting for "dibby daws" eggs. One after another they would climb the rickety old castle walls, then Geoffrey would stand on Billy's shoulders and Christopher again on his, while they reached up to the nests.

Christopher meant something very special to Billy—his smallness and reserve. From the time he was a baby in Dublin, when his cot was hung in green ribbons to keep the fairies away, to his last hurried meetings with Billy during the War, he was ever more beloved. In face they were much alike, and they made a funny looking couple those last years—Billy, whose height was 6 ft. 5 in., and Christopher, his tiny replica. Billy understood the sensitiveness which accompanies intense reserve, and treasured any signs of affection that "John" occasionally bestowed! When he was home on leave in October 1915 he motored with Christopher down to Oxford to spend an afternoon with their great-uncle George Congreve—a Cowley Father.

Christopher had been entirely silent during the drive, but as they were sitting and talking with their uncle in an atmosphere of remote peace, Billy suddenly felt a very small hand creep into his.

In 1904 he was sent to the late Mr. Macnaghten's house at Eton. He was rather idle at school but by no means stupid, and always he was a book-lover. His fondness for adventure did not confine itself to the holidays, and Mr. Macnaghten has described, in his *Memories of Eton*, a bird-nesting expedition of unlawful nature which was only one of many escapades. He was not particularly good at games nor cared much for them. He was a Wet Bob and a good oar, and one year he was in one of the winning boats. From 1908–9 he worked with a crammer

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in London, and passed into Sandhurst without any difficulty. On leaving he was second for the Sword of Honour: it was won by a great friend, and Billy sent home a photograph of their two selves, underneath which was written, "My greatest rival and dearest friend." While at Sandhurst Billy drew a map which was said to be the best of the year: it was sent up to the War Office with special commendation.

Just after going up for his medical examination he went with his mother to stay at Lindisfarne Castle, which then belonged to Mr. Edward Hudson, and where they had often spent the holidays. While he was there he developed diphtheria and spent many happy weeks of convalescence on Holy Island. Afterwards he would say that Lindisfarne was the most beautiful place he had ever seen—the castle that grew out of the rocks—and perhaps the happiest time of his life was passed there—because of the freedom and adventure. He would spend three days and nights sailing and fishing and spearing fish, then reappear dog-tired in the Castle, and drop down anywhere to sleep the clock round. All the Islanders were his friends—they still remember him and call him Billy. He loved to sail a boat, and once when sailing over to the Outer Farne Islands shot a cormorant through the eye seventy-five yards away. He had a poet's appreciation of beauty, and his happy memories of sport were always linked with remembrances of loveliness touching the countryside or of how the moonlight fell upon the water.

In 1911 he joined the 3rd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade at Tipperary. He left his family at Hythe, his father now being Commandant at the School of Musketry, and his going left the two small brothers quite disconsolate. He went full of happiness and hope to three years of good times and good companionship. In his growing years he had been through a struggle: black moods of depression and impatience, recklessness fighting with his

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hatred of hurting those he loved; and in those tumbling, hurting years he had learned much. And as he grew older he would say again and again that almost all the big and little unhappinesses were due to selfishness, and it seemed that, in knowing this, he came out into the sunlight that year he sailed away to Ireland.

Everything was new and delightful to him. He had always loved Ireland, and there were kind hosts with shooting and fishing, and long, hot, happy days in the Galtee mountains. In the winter he would get a few weeks' leave to hunt at Chartley.

Perhaps he took an equal delight in hunting, shooting, and fishing, but in shooting he would prefer a "pot-hunt." From a little boy he had always been a splendid companion: his mind was exceptionally quick, and from this came his aptness in an emergency, his witty, swift retorts, and his perception of other people's feelings. In Billy sympathy was such an outstanding quality that if he knew someone was unhappy he would not rest until he had helped to send the unhappiness away. It must have been this strongly felt sympathy that made him stand out among his friends. This and his moods of depression made him sometimes very sad in those happy years, and his face already showed the lines of an older man. Someone said: "When Billy comes into a room, everything at once becomes exciting and amusing." Because he thought much, he was conscious of the dragons that beset the happy valleys and he rode full tilt at them.

Three happy full years, and then came 1914. War meant a chance of adventure and honour and story-books come true to the boys of Billy's generation; and Billy, like the others, went full of enthusiasm, fearing to be too late, longing to slay the dragons of war, hoping for a chance that like his father he too might "valiant be, 'gainst all disaster."

Billy acted as A.D.C. to successive Commanders of the 3rd Division from General Hubert Hamilton to General

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Sir Aylmer Haldane. He was eventually made G.S.O.3 of that Division. On December 8th, 1915, he was made Brigade-Major of the 76th Infantry Brigade. It was first commanded by Brigadier-General Pratt and afterwards by Brigadier-General Kentish. Billy was still acting in this capacity when he was killed in the first Battle of the Somme. He was awarded the M.C. for his gallantry at Hooge in 1915, the D.S.O. in 1916 for his single-handed capture of 72 Germans at the Bluff, and a posthumous V.C. for his continuous acts of gallantry and endurance during the Battle of the Somme. He was also awarded the Légion d'Honneur, and was gazetted Brevet Major a month before his death. No other officer had previously been given the V.C., the D.S.O. and the M.C.

Up to a point in the War Billy kept very complete diaries, but this practice he gave up shortly after assuming the appointment of Brigade-Major to the 76th Infantry Brigade, presumably because he found himself too busy. This is the more unfortunate, in that some of the diaries, covering a most interesting period of the War, were destroyed by a fire which broke out in the Headquarters of the 3rd Division. In one of these he had described the counter-attack and recapture of the Bluff, an important observation point on the north bank of the Ypres–Commines Canal. This had been planned by Billy, and was a complete success. Of this operation Colonel C. P. Heywood, writing to Billy, said: "I heard all about your Bluff fight from Uniacke. It was the most inspiriting account I have ever heard of any show. You seem to have absolutely out-manœuvred and bewildered the Boche."

The last entry in the diary is December 30th, 1915, and on July 20th, 1916, he was killed. In the interval he went home to be married and had a honeymoon of ten days. Seven weeks later he was killed. He had already been wounded and had been ordered to hospital, but he

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refused to go. The story of his death and of the circumstances under which he won the Victoria Cross is told in the following letters from General Sir Aylmer Haldane and Brigadier-General Kentish, and in an extract from the *London Gazette*:

General Sir Aylmer Haldane writes:

". . . I will tell you all I can of the dear fellow. I had not seen him quite so often since July 8th, as I was busy with my two other Brigades, the 76th Brigade being in reserve as my best, thanks greatly to his splendid, untiring, and unselfish work and his splendid example.

"On the 18th, when things were not going too well, and I had been obliged to use the 76th Brigade—which I was preserving for another operation—I went through the ruined village of Montauban into the valley south of Longueval, where the headquarters of the Brigade were in a quarry. The enemy were very active, shelling heavily, and Billy had just returned from a dangerous visit to Longueval and gave me a lucid and manly account of what was going on there, I mean reassuring under the circumstances. He looked tired, but I knew that if I said he was overworking he would scorn the idea. That was the last time I saw him alive. Cameron, his faithful servant, who is heartbroken, and whom I saw yesterday, tells me that he was anxious and remonstrated with him for working at such high pressure and going so much to the front line, where of course his example was priceless. He told him to 'Shut up,' for Cameron spoke out before 'his General,' and said he ought to go!

"However, be that as it may, and I don't think anyone would have stood between him and his high conception of what he considered to be his duty, he went to the front again at night on the 19th to superintend arrangements for a second attack I had to make on Longueval. He seems to have gone there again, for about 9 a.m. yesterday I had an excellent report of the situation there. Shortly after he wrote it he must have lost his life. He was in a broken road leading into Longueval from the west, and was getting the 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment there to make themselves secure and when looking at the

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ground in front, which is somewhat higher, was shot by a German sniper from a cornfield. The bullet struck just below the breast-bone and he must have died practically instantaneously and certainly without pain. Cameron went up and, I fancy with difficulty and risk, brought him back. I believe it happened about 10 or so, for at 11 a.m. a telegram was sent to me telling me the sad news, and this reached me at 1.30. I telephoned to his father's Senior Staff Officer and asked him to break the sad news.

"I went to the Brigade Headquarters in Montauban as soon as I could, and I saw the Brigadier, but he had no particulars, and meeting Cameron on my way back he told me what I have written. I took one look at the dear fellow. He looked beautiful in his last sleep, so handsome and noble, and not a trace of pain on his face. He was then half-way to Carnoy, and on my way back there I met men of my regiment (Gordon Highlanders) carrying wild poppies and cornflowers to lay upon him, for his love for his Brigade was amply returned by all ranks. I met the padre of my regiment and told him to meet Cameron and do all he could. Eight officers of my regiment and the piper carried him into Carnoy, and he lay there last night, Cameron with him. My two A.D.C.'s will this morning, according to his father's wish, take him to Corbie, and his staunch ally Harrison, my chauffeur, and my own servant, Knight, who was devoted to him, will go too.

"I have often begged him to be careful, and though I daily prayed that he might be spared to you and his country, it was not to be so. I hoped to have got him on to command a brigade soon, but fate has willed it otherwise. If he had been my own son I could not have loved him more or been prouder of him.

"I confess that I have dreaded that he would not live till I could get him a Brigade, where for the normal Commander the risks would have been less, for his splendid standard of duty and great disregard of self made him think nothing too little to be done so long as anything remained to be done. He never spared himself and, that I trusted him as I have rarely trusted anyone in my life, was because I knew that no officer or man in the Division, and indeed few in the whole Army, had so

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high a sense of duty. He was a natural soldier with the instinct and perception which would have made him one day a great soldier, and now God has taken him as He always seems to take the best. . . .

"I know well how his devoted work was greatly inspired in order to help 'his General,' and I blame myself that he took so big a risk on my account, though I know no words of mine would have turned him aside from the straight path he trod."

Brigadier-General Kentish says:

"The officers, N.C.O.'s and men of my Brigade made the unanimous and spontaneous request to me that I should submit Billy's name for the V.C. This I had intended doing before I received the wishes of my Brigade."

Based upon the above recommendation the Victoria Cross was awarded to Billy in the following terms:

"For most conspicuous bravery during a period of fourteen days preceding his death in action. This officer constantly performed acts of gallantry, and showed the greatest devotion to duty, and by his personal example inspired all those around him with confidence at critical periods of the operations. During preliminary preparations for the attack he carried out personal reconnaissances of the enemy lines, taking out parties of officers and non-commissioned officers for over 1,000 yards in front of our line, in order to acquaint them with the ground. All these preparations were made under fire.

"Later, by night, Major Congreve conducted a Battalion to its position of deployment, afterwards returning to it to ascertain the situation after assault. He established himself in an exposed forward position from whence he successfully observed the enemy, and gave the orders necessary to drive them from their position. Two days later, when Brigade Headquarters were heavily shelled and many casualties resulted, he went out and assisted the medical officer to remove the wounded to places of safety, although he was himself suffering severely from gas and other shell effects. He again on

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a subsequent occasion showed supreme courage in tending wounded under heavy shell-fire.

"He finally returned to the front line to ascertain the situation after an unsuccessful attack, and whilst in the act of writing his report was shot and killed instantly." [1]

From the above it will have been seen how Billy stood in the estimation of those under whom he served. It only remains to quote from a letter from a friend to show in what light Billy appeared to one of his own rank:

"He had the gift of friendship, of understanding, and above all things he was reliable. He was ever most cheerful in times of greatest difficulty; in these times men turned to him naturally, and he was never at a loss. Forgetfulness of himself and thought for others, and an absolute faith in God, gave him courage unsurpassed. All men loved him and spoke well of him; only he ever forgot to speak well of himself. Personal ambition had no place in his heart; always he strove to do well, because he loved his country and loved and honoured God. Happiness was about him like a halo.

. . . . .

"I don't think there was ever anyone like him; he was absolutely glorious, and even when he was an A.D.C., all the men knew and loved him—which is unusual. His friendship has done more for me in many ways than I can say; it was the most priceless thing I had. He was the bravest and most gentle fellow in the world, and I can imagine the smile with which he greeted the 'sudden turn' when the bullet got him."

[1] Extract from *Supplement to the London Gazette*, October 26th, 1916.

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CHAPTER II

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARIES OF BILLY CONGREVE

i. The War Begins

"I have lost many youngsters whom I liked to think of as my friends, but I looked on Billy as something more than that."—Field-Marshal the Lord Plumer.

Moor Park Camp.
July 28th, 1914.

"Battalion training all day: horribly hot it is. Everyone was very full of 'scares,' but these are chiefly to do with the Ulster question, and it looks as if civil war is almost a certainty.

"After dinner we were all playing bridge, when suddenly Meysey was sent for. We all felt something was 'up,' and played on rather 'distrait.' He came back looking very important, and said the orders were that 'we were to march to Cork at 5 a.m. next morning.' Great excitement. I think we all felt rather hysterical, and such a muddle there was, as this meant the beginning of the 'Precautionary Period,' and of course all the papers were in Cork! We all started packing, and Meysey left at 10 p.m. for Cork in a car. Eventually most of us got to bed about twelve, and at 3 a.m. we were all up and wondering who had to go where. At 3.45 Meysey returned somewhat wearied, and the officers and men for duty in the Precautionary Period were warned. I, to my surprise, got a budget of papers which said that I had to go to Gyleen by the 4.30 train (that was in half an hour!).

"I found that my duties were to guard the tiny landing-place, and patrol the coast-line: my first independent job!

"Gyleen itself is a collection of thatched cottages clustered on the sides of a little valley which ends in the

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'harbour.' It is no longer a fishing village, and its population are now almost all old men and women, and the few active inhabitants are farmers. However, we managed to get some fish from a boat which came in. I bought a five-foot conger soon after arriving for 1½*d.* a foot; the men and I eat him for breakfast with potatoes and margarine. Jolly good it was, too!"

July 31st.

"I have got quite a good camping place touching the village, and it is close to water. The villagers are at present very suspicious, as they think we are here to stop gun-running, though I am fairly sure now it's Germany and not Ulster. Anyhow, I shall tell them this, or things may be tiresome. I feel I have sufficient of the Irishman in me to overcome their doubts.

"Still raining like blazes. Conger eel and potatoes again for breakfast. My tent only leaks in one place, but of course that place happened to be directly over my clothes, so this morning I had to put on a very moist pair of breeches, which was unpleasant.

"The nearest 'pub' (about 100 yards!) is run by a pair of girls whose dirt and language are both prodigious: their remarks when Sergeant Cox, Corporal McDonell and White and I went in to dry ourselves by their fire made me quite 'hot'! If I asked for a drink it was, 'Yes, here you are, darlin',' and the same to the N.C.O.'s.

"The guns we heard to-day were fired by *Carlisle* to bring boats entering the harbour to a standstill; the *Inniscarra,* through ignorance or swelled head, near got herself sunk, for she refused to stop."

August 2nd.

"They brought me news of a probable mobilisation to-morrow; also the following items from the wireless receiving station at Carlisle:

"(1) 5 a.m.—Message begins, 'Martial Law declared in Germany, who is reported to be fighting Russia; bank rate 8 per cent. (The latter part of this message leaves me unmoved.)

"(2) To a passenger, s.s. *Olympic*: 'Have darling girl two days old, all think the image of father, thanks ring, love from baby and self."

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August 3rd.

"Germans have apparently invaded France and Luxembourg, so if we don't go in now we are about as chicken-hearted a lot as ever existed; please goodness we are not going to sit down and watch France 'done in.' Nobody will ever help or trust us again if we stay out now.

"A naval reservist here got his orders to-day amidst great excitement and wailing! Yesterday he was breathing fire and murder against Carson; to-day he said, 'The first —— German I meet I will smash his head in,' so it looks as if this might be a good solution to the Irish question."

August 4th.

"Tom came in this afternoon and said we were expected to mobilise at any moment.

"This evening we have all been out at the low tide winkle hunting; the men are as happy as a lot of children and over-eat themselves horrid. They bring me various dainties to eat, winkles especially. They picked about a hundred out of their shells and brought them to me on a plate. I didn't like to hurt their feelings by saying I'd much sooner do my own pin-work!"

August 5th.

"Heard from Dads. He says Geoff.[1] sailed on the *Hannibal* some days ago. I wonder if he will see anything.

"All the village is very perturbed. They follow us about and weep copious tears and utter long-winded blessings. Mr. —— came up to me with a somewhat alcoholic manner, and mysteriously ushered me into his holy of holies, a stuffy, dirty hole. Here he gave me whisky of great merit (?) and potent beyond words, and a box of cigars. I had to take all this, and many words of affection besides. I hope I played my part well. Mr. Llynch, an old naval reservist, *very* old, gave me a book called *Naval War*—an effort of about fifty years ago—which was a great treasure of his. Poor old man, it's a very dirty book, and I don't know how to skilfully get rid of the cigars and it. Harris[2] has been told though to deal with both."

[1] His brother. [Ed.]

[2] His servant. [Ed.]

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August 6th.

"There is a big spy scare on all round. I've had special orders to watch for them here. I wonder if —— is also a spy as well as a delightful scoundrel.

"*Later.*—Tender farewells from the village; 'Never had they seen so well-behaved a lot of men,' etc., etc. I had my hand kissed by a tearful old lady, and felt a hero at once! It was quite an ovation."

August 7th.

"I wasn't relieved till nearly 7 a.m., and when the relief did turn up it did so in driblets and was all stale drunk. I've never seen such a dismal horrid crew and feel very sorry for my friends the villagers."

August 14th.

"This has been a truly painful week, waiting for orders to move, getting reservists tuned up, etc., etc. All very weary work and depressing. Rumour has it we are to be left in England as Home Defence, which will be *too* awful.

"All moves of the Expeditionary Force have been kept marvellously silent. Only to-day did I hear from Joe Starkey (who has been sent to the Depot) as follows: 'By going into the Docks at Southampton to-day I managed to find out that the 1st and 2nd Divisions sailed on Saturday the 8th; the 3rd sails Thursday the 13th.' No papers have even mentioned this. Here we are, now ready to move, and believed to be going to move to-day, and yet it is now 1.30 p.m. and we have had no orders. Even when we do go we are told on no account by letter, etc., to state our port of disembarkation, and till we reach port it's unlikely we shall know whether it's England or the Continent we have reached!

"Hannah and Maggie's [1] safety charm is now sewn inside my coat. My 25 lb. of kit don't look much: 1 bivouac, 1 flea-bag, 1 Jaeger lined Burberry, 1 pair breeches, 1 coat, 1 shirt, 2 pairs of socks, 1 towel, 1 Shetland woollen shawl—and that's the lot, besides, of course, what I am actually wearing and carrying on me. It don't seem much for what may be an affair of some months.

[1] Hannah and Anastasia Doyle, for many years with the Congreves. They originally came as nurse and housemaid. [Ed.]

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"P.B. and Norman both have their families here, and we had a great dinner of farewell last night at the hotel. I should laugh if we didn't go after all, though in some ways I should near weep with rage. As it is, everybody keeps on saying good-bye and then meeting again next day! I've given up saying good-bye—it's a rotten thing to have to say at best. W. N. C.[1] is, I believe, at Edinburgh. Poor Cis [2] is very low, but has John [3] and Elsie [4] to comfort her; it must be hard to be a woman now. I am mighty sorry for them all, but should be a deal more sorry if we were not to go, or if we went, to find ourselves too late."

August 17th.

"At last we got our orders to move. We got a real good send-off from the people.

"The men have blankets, and are lying about all over the decks. It was rather fine leaving the harbour and steaming down the river to Queenstown. We all hung over the side waving to the people on shore, who did heavy shouting work and much flag waving. We have got up a sweepstake as to where we are bound for. I've got Plymouth, which seems a possibility.

"*Later.*—It's Holyhead we are for, and where we go on from there nobody knows. I am on watch to-night ten to twelve, and four to six, but I believe we shall get in by 4 a.m. It's beautifully calm, so there should be no delay. Every boat we pass blows its siren and the crew cheers: several motors followed us all the way down the river."

August 20th.

"We got to Holyhead early Tuesday after a lovely crossing. We only took about an hour to disembark and entrain, and started off to Cambridge. It *was* a slow journey. I wired to Cis [2] from Chester that we would be going through Stafford at 11.30, which we did—about 70 miles an hour though! It was bad luck. It was really the only station we did not stop or slow down at. I

[1] His father. [2] His mother.
[3] His youngest brother.
[4] His aunt, Mrs. Laurence Buxton. [Ed.]

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caught a glimpse of poor Cis on the platform, and managed to throw a weighted letter almost at her feet. I heard from her last night that she got it all right, and that John saw me, so it was not quite a failure.

"We got to Cambridge about 6 p.m. and marched into camp there. It's on a sort of common in the town, and our tents are only fifty yards from the main road, so we have plenty of visitors, chiefly female! Norman performed a fine and typical feat to-day. I found him sitting on the grass outside his tent, with his back to the crowds, stark naked and washing hard! He then stood up and demanded I should pour water over him, which I did: the crowd was intensely interested, but he was quite unabashed, and dried himself outside too with a *very* small towel! I don't suppose that the staid aunts and young ladies of Cambridge have ever seen a naked gentleman having a bath on their Common before within fifty yards of the main road. However, they bore up very well, I thought. The local policeman was for once utterly defeated; I could see the struggle going on inside him between his usual duty and the novelty of the situation.

"Everyone is exceedingly kind, and really we would be very happy but for the fact that we are so longing to get away to business."

September 4th.

"Still waiting. A week ago to-morrow we were shifted from Cambridge to here—Newmarket—as being a better camping place, and where we eventually entrain if ever we do.

"Everyone here is very kind to us, and though we are supposed to be feeding at the Rutland Arms we most of us only have breakfast there. Cis, John and Maggie turned up at Cambridge for the week-end, and good it was to see them. Cis is off on Red Cross work to Belgium this week. I believe they got their orders to go to Ostend. I have kept John, and he is now living in my bivouac, and is as happy as the day is long. He comes out with 'Wumps'[1] on our field days—Godders takes him on the machine-gun limber, and everyone spoils him.

[1] John's white rat. [Ed.]

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'Wumps' lives in his shirt, and seems happy enough there. Our chief hosts are Mrs. Tharp of Chippenham, the Neumanns, Gilpins and Fortescues. I forget the Giles, who we really see most of.

September 8th.

"On Sunday John and I biked into Cambridge to see Dads, and spent the day with him. Very peaceful and happy it was. He seemed to think we had little chance of moving. We biked back to Newmarket in the evening, and about 9 p.m. came a wire to say we were 'to be ready to move to-morrow' (Monday). Yesterday we packed everything up. I sent poor little John off into Cambridge, and at 5 p.m. we entrained. The Giles came to see us off. It was a lovely day as usual. "We left about 6.15 and went straight to Southampton, where we arrived about 1.30 a.m., and went straight on board a 'trooper,' an 8,000-ton immigrant ship called the *Lake Michigan* of Liverpool. This morning we were allowed on shore, and Godders and I went off to see Dads on the *Georgia*. He seemed very fit and happy, and had heard from Cis, who is off to-day from Folkestone."

September 10th.

"Here we are at St. Nazaire. We got here early this morning."

September 13th.

"We were kept on board till yesterday morning, when we went in and disembarked, a longish job, as the quay was a long way below us. At first we were told we were to go into camp, but instead spent from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in sitting in a coal-yard on the docks. I and others made several amusing journeys to the town, which is a fairly big one. I found my French useful if not fluent, and we laid in vast stores of all sorts of eatables—fruit, bread, butter, potted things, and also a large supply of very good chocolate. Everywhere we went we were objects of great interest. Many times was I asked for my silver cap-badge as a 'souvenir,' but I saw no lady pretty enough. However, one got a button off me! About 4.30 we started to entrain in pouring rain.

"I managed to sleep all right last night. About 6 a.m. we reached Tours, where we had breakfast. I ran up

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and got some boiling water out of the engine and made some chocolate for Godders and I—jolly good it was. All day we have been rolling along, and about 5.30 this evening passed Paris.

"All the way up we have seen French soldiers in their blue coats and red trousers, and at the halts we had great talks to them: they seem very intelligent fellows, and I take it were all reserves of some type. It was amusing to see the scramble for the train when it suddenly started. Luckily it was so cumbersome a show that one could let it go a hundred yards and then catch it. Everywhere we were given apples and cigarettes by the people. The country was pretty at first, and it was hard to believe war even existed, except that one saw sentries everywhere guarding the line. There was a constant demand for souvenirs, and a lot of men are now minus their cap badges. I still have seen no one worthy of mine!"

September 14th.

"Coulommiers. We reached here early this morning about 3.30 a.m. It was pitch-dark and raining, so detraining was a beastly job, and after a lot of hanging about we got to some huge sheds—a sugar refinery—where we have had some sort of a meal. The Germans were here some days ago, and I believe surprised some of our men in these actual sheds.

"Our fighting line is about forty miles off, and there are small parties of Germans still hanging about between us and them—lost, I suppose. We march some time this morning. I haven't seen W. N. C. to-day, though some of his Brigade are here, so he can't be far off. Everyone is very cheerful and well. I am rather bad in the tummy, but otherwise splendid. It must be too much St. Nazaire fruit, I think. I have doped myself from my medicine box, so shall probably die.

"We left about 12 noon; it was then quite fine, and marched to this place (Busseroles), passing through Boissy, St. Germain, Doue and St. Cyr, about 12 miles and not bad going. I found my impedimenta quite heavy enough.

"The whole Battalion is bivouacked here in a big mill. Rather crowded we are, but it's not so bad. Norman,

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Godders and I are occupying a corner together. I think there are rats there too. We are feeding at a farm-house on eggs and rabbits; they keep the latter in this country just as we keep fowls! There is also some excellent cider. A week ago six German officers billeted themselves in the same house and seemed to have behaved all right.

"We have just finished dinner. The rabbits were grand, and the lady made us tomato salad of great merit.

"I believe we leave at 5 a.m. to-morrow, and I guess we shall have a long march. We have outposts out to-night, and about 6 p.m. heard firing, but believe it's only peasants out hunting and killing stray Germans—they make sort of organised hunts, and goodness knows what they do to a live German if they catch him. There are a good many still in the woods round here—came in yesterday and gave themselves up, half-starved and miserable they were. We most of us to-night had a good wash in the Morin."

September 15th.

"Originally we were told we were to billet in Azy, but about 2.30 we marched through there and halted east of the town for about three hours, getting something to eat and most of us a bathe in the Marne. We were told that we must go on to Bezo that night, as Sir John French had wired back that he urgently needed the Division. We must have done 25 miles yesterday, but I haven't had time to measure it yet. A lot of our march was along the Marne, and very pretty it was, lots of vineyards, and I got some grapes from a small boy, which were very welcome in the heat.

"We saw many evidences of war—old bivouacs, trenches and graves—some dead horses too, which were none too pleasant to halt near! We heard gun firing from 12 noon onwards, and now hear that we might be fighting to-day—possibly!

"We bivouacked last night just as we were, and a bad night it was, for though the day had been fearfully hot and dusty, it changed at night. I had just boiled myself some chocolate and made a meal of sorts when the rain started again. It rained all night and is going on still.

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We were in an orchard and had plenty of straw. I personally kept dry, as I dug myself into the stack and put my Burberry over my legs, but most of the men and other officers have not been so lucky and are soaked through. I heard groans and grunts during the night, and someone would now and then get up and try and find some drier spot. I cursed when they tried to share my bed! and felt rather like a cross old dog! I feel rather superior being dry this morning. Also I carried a man's equipment the last 8 miles yesterday in addition to my own —Lewis is the man, he has very bad sores, but is a wonderfully plucky little man. My platoon are good fellows and none fell out.

"It's now 5.30 a.m., and we have had a breakfast of sorts. We move at seven. I wonder what to-night will have shown me!

"*Later,* 8.30 p.m.—A very tiring day. We have come about another 20 miles, and as we none of us slept well last night, we are all very weary. Marching was very hard to-day. We are now billeted round Visigneux. The Company is in a farm, hidden down in a little hollow. Some are sleeping in lofts and some outside.

"We saw our first guns in action to-day. We passed a great many wounded going back in motor supply lorries.

"We had a grand meal to-night, and I never felt I needed one more—tea, omelet and rabbit stew. Oh, but I am weary to-night; it's a good feeling really. No news about to-morrow yet. I do hope we don't move too early. I haven't had a wash since yesterday afternoon, and feel (and am!) filthy. I had no time to-night."

September 17th.

"Just had time for a wash and bacon and tea when we were hurried off. I had a splendid night on some straw. My platoon also shared the straw, and I was much enraged when the dirtiest young scoundrel in my platoon—B—— had a nightmare and rolled on to me, his beastly feet hitting me in the face. I swore lusty, and he was somewhat aggrieved, not remembering who I was!

"There was tremendous rifle fire on the left all night, and to-day there is a terrible battle going on there. It

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sounds so close. The big gun-fire is incessant. We marched this morning east instead of our usual trek north, and have only come a few miles to this place (Villeblain), where we are in billets.

"We got very wet this morning, though we were only *en route* a few hours, and it's still pouring. I am now dry again, though, and with a full tummy. What a lot I seem to write about food; this is hungry work, though, and somehow foraging around for victuals is amusing and the results interesting. Saw Father Waggett to-day. How he got out here I don't know; he says he saw Dads to-day and reports him well. I have managed to send off a few P.C.'s to-day, and hear a happy rumour of the possibility of a mail coming in—cigarettes, perhaps! but I fear it's unlikely.

"*Later.*—Dinner is just over, very good too. We live with a very pleasant French family—father (who is very ancient, is kept in great order and takes snuff!), son who was childishly pleased to get a little 'tabac' from me (he had had none for two weeks), mother and two daughters. They are very good company, and it's more than true how wonderfully the French cook vegetables: the potatoes this evening were just glorious.

"It has stopped raining now, and the guns are still going strong. Apparently we shall move to the firing-line now if things go ill, or to make a counter-attack. We are 7 miles from the firing-line. To-night the 5th Division sent in an urgent requisition for tools, so things look tough. We breakfast at 7 a.m. to-morrow. I am sleeping in a cement-floored loft by myself—most luxurious! I shan't be bothered by Rifleman B——'s horrid feet."

September 18th.

"Saw Dads, as usual these days, very fit. He told me privately that we move to-night to take over trenches from the 19th Infantry Brigade, somewhere over the Aisne, and that there we shall sit under shell-fire until the French get things going.

"The prospect of sitting in trenches for some days is none too pleasant, and I shall take as much in the way of warm things as I can carry."

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September 20th.

"We did not go into the trenches on Friday after all, but Dads was sent off to the east of our position about 17 miles off. We stayed all day at Villeblain, eating like pigs.

"On Saturday we said good-bye to our good friends M. and Mme Laslie, and marched to Courcelles, leaving about 1 p.m. and arriving long after dark, about 10 p.m. We had to go a long way round, making it a march of 17 miles, the last few being in pitch-dark over cobble-stones. I was very glad to get in. These *pavé* roads are the very devil to march on. We put the men into billets, and then Norman found five of us a fine room. He and I shared the bed, the others on the floor: good it was. It is the first time I've been in bed for some weeks. All day while marching we could hear the guns on our left.

"At Courcelles we could hear the battle much more clearly, the rattle of the machine guns and even the noise the big shells made in the air.

"About 1 p.m. we marched off to just outside Vielle Arcy. Here we halted about 6 p.m., and it sounded as if we were very close indeed to business. The shells of our own guns kept yelling overhead, and one could see the enemy's shrapnel bursting, especially after it got dark. There were also extraordinary heavy bursts of rifle and machine-gun fire: a jolly sort of Sunday evening!

"We had been brought up here to relieve the Guards Brigade, who during the last three days have had twenty attacks on them, and have piled up corpses in front of their trenches till they can hardly see out of them; the smell is, I hear, horrible. I don't like smells. However, we were eventually told to bivouac where we were, on the edge of the road. I think I shall be fairly comfortable under a haystack with my thick Burberry and waterproof sheets, which we have just had issued out to us. I had a good tea with old Godders, and we got well warmed before we were ordered to put out our fires. It is curious lying here and to know of the fighting so very close. The noise is terrific every now and then, and the guns are still at work, though it's a pitch-dark night."

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September 21st.

"It's still very early—5 a.m.—and we are still as yet without orders. It rained a good deal last night, but I managed to sleep all right. I thought I was going to have a bad night, as a family of rats or mice were squabbling in the stack just by my head. I told them to shut up though, and they were good fellows. I've just seen a weasel, who apparently *also* shared my bed, and may account for the disturbance I heard amongst the rats!

The firing is still going on like blazes. We are now in a wood out of sight of aeroplanes. A constant stream of supplies, reinforcements and staff motors keep on passing. I saw Brookie last night, so apparently the Irish Horse are here. He was very fit and cheery."

September 23rd.

"Great events (personal) have taken place. General Keir passed by, and seeing me stopped and asked if I wanted to go to General Hammy, as he (Hammy) had again asked for me. Of course I said yes, so he rode up and told R. A. I *was* to go. *Bien!* Jellunda was very buggy indeed about it, which, however, I bore up under well enough; in fact, I felt rather satisfied that he had been ordered to let me go.

"I got my kit together, said good-bye to Godders (who kindly gave me a spare pair of leggings), and went off in a car that General Johnny Gough provided me with. It was horrid my leaving them all just as the Battalion was off to the trenches, but the offer was too good to lose. Godders I shall miss desperate and Harris [1] too is a sad loss, but I hope to get hold of him again soon. We motored to Braisne, where I reported myself to H. H. at his headquarters. He at once gave me an outline of my job, and it isn't very complicated. Headquarters consists of about 100 men, servants, grooms, clerks, etc., and 80 horses. These I have to look after, also the messing arrangements. We are a total of about 25 officers, and live in two messes. I look after one mess and Thorpe (A. and S. Highlanders) the other. He is the other A.D.C., and seems a very good fellow.

[1] His servant. [Ed.]

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"My great difficulty now is to raise a servant and groom. I have raised a good horse, three saddles and a bridle, and I hope to get the two men soon. I can't say how I miss little Harris. H. H. is very good to me, and seems glad to have me with him. Everything looks very happy.

"The war goes on well, or rather the battle all along our lines.

ii. Aisne Fighting

"No man more triumphantly splendid has been disclosed by this War; such magnificent humanity, the very best embodiment of noble youth I ever saw."—Sir Martin Conway.

September 25th, 1914.

"We hold the Germans, in spite of desperate attacks on their part.

"We are much bothered by spy scares. The Germans seem to have an uncanny knowledge of what goes on this side of the river, and it certainly must be largely due to spies, and not only aeroplanes. In Chassemy village it was noticed that only one man had horses and cattle left him, and this looking suspicious, he was arrested and searched. On him they found a large sum of money—much larger than he could have come by honestly; they then searched his house, and found in the cellar a German working a telephone, the line of which went over the river. Both were given very short shift. Altogether in the last ten days we have caught and shot sixty spies, most of them bribed peasants. They are usually handed over to the French authorities for justice, which is less merciful than ours, as a matter of fact. It is extraordinary that Frenchmen, who one would think had good reason to loathe Germany, should help them, yet many do."

September 27th.

"A scare last night. About 3 a.m. an officer of the 5th Division (on our left) reported that 'the enemy were crossing Condé bridge in great numbers.' We were all hunted out of bed, and very misty and cold it was. I rode to Chassemy with H. H., and after waiting there till about 7.30 a.m. we rode home via the Brenelle plateau.

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The scare was only a scare. However it was, as H. H. said, 'excellent practice.' I expect someone will get his tail twisted for starting the story.

"I got breakfast all right, and then took a map and message up in one of the cars to General Wing (the C.R.A.), who is up at Brenelle. He is a delightful gentleman and always in the thick of everything. He got a shell splinter in his leg a few days ago, but is still doing his job all right.

"Nearly all the guns of the Division are concealed on the plateau, and very well too. Whenever the Germans 'find' them they shift to another place, and really at present this battle has developed into an Artillery duel, nothing very fierce but a constant interchange of shots. Of course the Infantry are constantly sniping each other, but that is all that happens here for the moment.

"On Friday in the afternoon I rode over to see Francis,[1] and after some trouble found him and his battery (4 guns) comfortably dug in down at Ciry—very far forward! He was very well and cheerful, and has been recommended for a French decoration which, from all accounts, he most thoroughly deserves.

"There wasn't much I could do for Francis. However, I am to get him some soup tablets and a few other eatables. He has only three subalterns whose united services come to a total of six years, so it means constant work for F. The Infantry were dug in about 1,000 yards in front of the guns.

"This afternoon who should turn up at H.Q. but Winston Churchill. He wanted 'to see things,' so H. H. handed him over to my tender care with orders to take him up to the observation station above Chassemy. He was dressed as a Trinity Brother—blue coat, brass buttons, etc. We went up in his car to just short of Chassemy. Captain Guest was driving. The car was a beauty, a 60-h.p. Rolls-Royce. Half-way there W. C. asked me, 'Are you quite sure there are no parties of Germans inside our lines' (there *had* been a few half-starved wretches found in the big woods). I said I was sure there were none. However, this did not satisfy

[1] His uncle, Captain, now Lieutenant-Colonel F. L. Congreve, D.S.O., M.C. [Ed.]

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him, and I had to get his revolver out from his coat pocket, a very fierce-looking weapon which he held ready for action on his knee! I was a bit scared of that revolver, as it was one of those patent beasts that you 'pull the trigger and the gun does the rest' sort of thing. However, it didn't get going.

"When I got the car behind the Brenelle ridge I told them to wait while I went up to see if things were fairly quiet. Only a few shells were coming over, and I took him up to the observation station, from where one gets an excellent view over the river. There wasn't much to see, but a few of their shells came gurgling over, and I was glad when they were safely over and bursting well behind us, for I am by no means used to them yet myself. One hears one coming groaning along towards one, and a funny feeling of weakness lays hold of one's middle, especially if one is in the open. I always feel I should like to get into a hole, and it's a relief when it bursts, probably some hundreds of yards off. I haven't had one really close to me yet. One sees a column of mud and smoke and then the crash of the explosion. We got away without any excitement.

"I must say he was very nice to me. He hadn't much information to give, except that 'I am sending out some 9.2 guns.' I got out of the car in Braisne, and he went on to see the Scots Greys at Courcelles."

September 29th.

"We have an excellent Frenchman on the staff here, called René Duval. He speaks quite good English, and is a well-read and much-travelled fellow. He has a 'Minerva' car, and is tremendously useful in going into Paris and bringing back with him every sort and kind of 'stores.'

"He is a splendid shopper, and I don't know how we should get on without him. I am especially dependent on him at present, for I get neither letters nor parcels from home at all. I suppose my change of address has done that. Last night he turned up with groceries galore, tobacco of every shape and kind, papers and clothes; in fact, he is a real blessing."

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October 1st.

"What might have been rather a serious accident took place yesterday afternoon. The Norwegian minister in Paris got leave from G.H.Q. to come over here to be shown round. Instead of coming to us to ask his way, he must needs go off on his own, apparently thinking he could drive his car right up to the trenches. He went up through Brenelle to carry out this plan, and set off across the plateau towards the river. He got half-way over when the Germans spotted the car and opened on it with 'crumps.' The first shell made the chauffeur pull up! and they began to try and turn the car. That was as far as they got, though, for 'crumps' began to arrive in quantities and they fled to the shelter of some neighbouring haystacks, leaving the car to its fate. They saw the chauffeur get hit as he was getting out of the car; whether he was killed or not they didn't know. Eventually and with great good fortune they got back to General Wing's H.Q. unhurt, but covered with mud and dust and bits of haystack. The R.A. sent them on down here, and the Duke of Marlborough (who is doing King's Messenger) happening to be with us, took them back in his car.

"The old minister, a fat middle-aged gentleman, was awfully pleased with himself, but was scared lest it should get into the papers, in which case the Germans would say that Norway had broken her neutrality! We calmed his fears of this, picked straws and mud out of his hair, and sent him off to G.H.Q. with his two A.D.C.'s and the Duke, after we had given them tea.

"I then took a car and two chauffeurs up to see what I could do to their car, expecting to find it smashed to pieces. We waited till dusk and then walked out to it. The car was intact, but the chauffeur dead, and every bit of glass in the car was smashed to atoms—big strong plate-glass. It was a lovely big brand-new Panhard limousine, and beyond the glass, a few bits off the paint and a small hole in the petrol tank there was no great damage, which considering the number of 'crump' holes round it, was a marvel. Inside the car was a good mixture of glass and mud, which we cleared out, and while the hole in the tank was being mended I finished

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off the old boy's luncheon basket—chicken there was, and great fat pears, and also a huge supply of cigarettes and tobacco for the men in the trenches! There were also heaps of matches. Before he left the 'minister' said I might keep all this, 'pour les braves soldats,' so I did so, and sent the car on to G.H.Q. under the second chauffeur, who shed tears."

October 6th.[1]

"On Monday Duval and I came on to Crépy in his car, and again found very good billets. (Duval of course is a great help in this again.) It's an even prettier old town, with some lovely old buildings.

"One house (into which I put the C.R.E., Colonel Wilson) is quite a famous little place, and is called the 'Rose House.' It used to belong to Margaret of Navarre, and is decorated over the doors and windows with carved stone roses; inside it is also very pretty.

"Wonder of wonders at La Ferte Millon, I got a parcel from that beloved Edward.[2] Such a fine one too —a woolly jersey, a change of underclothes, a shirt, two pairs of socks, chocolate, and a box of those too much beloved Sullivan cigarettes. May Edward live for ever! It was a joy, that parcel.

"*Later.*—It is 10.30 now and we are still here. There have been three quite pretty girls down with apples and little medals. The apples they are giving free of charge, but for the medals they demand 'souvenirs' in exchange. One called Marguerite I have made great friends with. I have given her my whistle and lanyard, and she gave me a Joan of Arc medal. They have just gone off. I wonder what Marguerite will do with the whistle. I put it round her neck."

October 11th.

"I have hardly had a moment to myself for the last few days, and though it is very late now I feel I must get up-to-date with this. We spent all Wednesday in Abbeville. I am billeted with an old lady who was most awfully kind. She seized on my collection of dirty

[1] On October 5th they marched by day to Pont St. Maxence, where they entrained for Abbeville *en route* to Flanders. [Ed.]

[2] Edward Hudson.

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clothes and washed them beautifully, and was altogether most untiring in her efforts to please.

"Thursday I was kept busy at odd jobs, and at 1 p.m. went on with Duval to billet at Le Boisel. We found fairly good places, though it is only a village, and returned to Abbeville about 5 p.m. It was amusing at Le Boisel: I was the first 'soldat Anglais' they had seen, and one house we went to the good lady nearly threw a fit when she saw me. She explained on recovering that she thought I was *un Allemand*, and on realising her mistake nearly threw another fit with joy!

"We passed an aviation ground on the way back, the 3rd and 4th Squadrons, consisting of about 30 'planes' of all sorts and descriptions. A very workmanlike party they were, with a huge convoy of lorries and a wireless installation. I met Barton (Scots Fusiliers), who is pilot on a big biplane which is mounted with a machine-gun. He chases any German plane on sight, and says it is splendid fun. He thinks he has bagged one. I rather envied him—a fight in the air must be as good a thrill as one can get on this earth (this sounds Irish!).

We moved from Abbeville at 1 a.m. Friday (the 9th) and marched along in the most lovely moonlight; it *was* cold though. The aeroplanes which we again passed looked most weird in the moonlight. We got into Le Boisel about 7 a.m. I got three hours' sleep in Abbeville before we moved, and my dear landlady gave me tea before I left and many good wishes.

As soon as we were settled in and had had breakfast I was sent off to billet again, this time in a bigger town called Hesdin. I went off about 11 a.m. with Duval, and got everything fixed up all right. We were surrounded with kind people offering us billets, which was most helpful. I picked out two quite pretty girls who were evidently friends, and arranged for Colonel Wilson and his Adjutant to go to the home of the less pretty, while I arranged to go to the other's house. The family consisted of Mme and Mlle and 'une domestique.' I had a very good time.

"I got the General and everyone safely settled in by 8 p.m., and then went back and had dinner at my 'billet.' The girl is called Marie Louise, so I called

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her Mary. Both she and Madame were wondrous kind, partly I think as the master of the house was Colonel of a Zouave Battalion, and was away 'fighting somewhere.' I was frightfully tired, so got to bed at once after dinner, though first of all I had to be shown some of the family treasures. We had to move at 4 a.m., so at three I was up and heard a knock on the door. Outside I found the three ladies of the house, ready to conduct me to a bath! We formed a triumphal procession, and I had a glorious tub in front of the kitchen fire. My first real tub I think since St. Nazaire! It *was* good, and then feeling simply grand I found tea and bread-and-butter waiting me, a postcard with their names on it and photo of Marie Louise. We had a good though long march to Pernes. Pernes was an awful sight, streams of refugees from hills—mostly men—crowds of our men and French soldiers, and in addition there were cattle being slaughtered all over the place. It was beastly.

"However, we got billets fixed up, and I had quite a good night in bed in my house. Really I am beginning to expect a bed nowadays, and generally manage it, as I have all the arrangements to make! It is curious the various places I've slept in since coming out here: châteaux, public-houses, farms and haystacks! The châteaux are not to be compared to our country houses. They are huge sometimes, but almost always uncomfortable, even when the owners are still in them; hardly ever a bathroom, or even any signs of 'un bain de seige.' I suppose the blighters never do wash.

We moved from Pernes about 8 p.m. and marched to Gonnehem, where we halted for some time, and eventually pushed on to Hinges, where I found a *very* fine château—once again a bed!

"This is only a small place (Hinges). We are very close to Germans now."

October 12th.

"I saw signs of German brutality to-day for the first time. We found a poor old man hiding in a haystack. He must have been a good eighty years old, and was half mad with terror. No wonder, for his face was a mass of blood, and some brute had evidently hit

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him, probably with a rifle butt. He was too terrified to talk, and had apparently been hiding for some time. We handed him over to two French soldiers, who led him away to get him bound up. It's almost incredible that soldiers should so treat an unarmed 'ancient' like that, yet I fear there was but little doubt."

October 13th.

"I got a good though short night on a mattress outside H. H.'s room and we rode out together at 5.30 and went to Kelle Chapelle. He was very cheery, and I think likes getting to business again. 7th Brigade H.Q. were still there. The church spire fell in last night, and it is now only a pile of smoking ruins.

"Then we went on to the 8th Brigade in Lacouture and saw General Doran. They had had some sharp fighting; the Worcesters got one Company badly cut up—they got too far ahead and were badly enfiladed at short range. Fighting in the close country is the very devil. They lost five officers (two killed) and a lot of men. There were several of our own and German dead about.

"We are to push on hard to-day, and are already at it hammer and tongs.

"It's such a lovely day.

"A German aeroplane dropped a bomb close to Corps H.Q. at Hinges last night. Also a lot of notices printed in French advising the French to surrender at once, as they were bound to be beaten in the end, also stating how well the Germans looked after their prisoners! I don't think!

"We moved our H.Q. up here to-day (Lacouture) and have fairly good billets. Our progress is rather held up on the left; we are apparently held up by German cavalry and Jaegers—the latter fight like tigers and shoot mighty straight. The cavalry consist partly of Death's Head Hussars. We caught a few of them; very smart their fuzzy busbies look with the skull and crossbones in silver on front. The Germans are good at this fighting: they put all the houses in a state of defence, and it takes a lot to shift them out. Our billet is a big farm, and I have quite a comfortable room."

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October 14th.

"Lacouture. As bad a thing happened this morning as ever could happen. Hammy is dead, and we lose a splendid soldier and I a very good friend. Almost more than a friend he has been lately. He and Thorpe were out to the north of Vielle Chapelle; he had gone to see personally why our left was hung up. They were dismounted and standing on the road, when a salvo of shrapnel burst right over them. One bullet hit him in the forehead, and he died almost immediately. He never spoke or opened his eyes. There were several other officers there besides Thorpe, yet nobody else was hit.

"We brought his body back here to-night in a motor ambulance. We had to wait till night, as the road was still being shelled. During the day I had a rough coffin made and a grave dug under the walls of the old church here, and at 7.15 p.m. when the ambulance arrived we put him into it just as he was, wrapped in a blanket. I had to take the spurs off his poor feet though, as they wouldn't fit, and then we nailed on the lid. I then put a guard round him with fixed bayonets and left him.

"At 8.30 we all assembled, there was a representative from each unit, and Sir Horace S.-D. turned up also. Poor Lindsay, his servant, kept on breaking down. It was a pitch-dark night and had been raining hard all day, so there was mud everywhere and a cold wet "feel" in the air. The rifle and machine-gun fire was very heavy, and it sounded but a few yards away, so loud was it and so still the night. Stray bullets now and then knocked up against the church and grave-stones, but somehow nobody bothered about them.

"Just before the Chaplain arrived the firing almost ceased, but while the short service was being read it commenced again louder and nearer than ever, so loud indeed that the Chaplain's voice could hardly be heard.

"The scene was the strangest and most beautiful I have ever seen. The poor old church battered by shells, the rough wooden coffin with a pewter plate nailed on the lid on which we had stamped his name, a rough cross of flowers made by the men, the small guard with fixed bayonets and the group of twenty or thirty bareheaded officers and men. Above all the incessant

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noise, so close, sometimes dying down only to seem to redouble itself a few minutes later. A ghastly sort of light was given by a couple of acetylene lamps from a car. It was soon over, and then each officer and man stood for a moment by the grave, saluted, and went back to his work.

"Sir Horace, in that rather wonderful voice of his said:

"'Indeed, a true soldier's grave. God rest his soul.' Nobody else spoke. I wanted to cry. I stayed and saw the filling in of the grave, and now I must see to putting up a cross."

iii. Neuve Chapelle, 1914

"I have heard so much about him lately and what a real good boy he was; in fact, I gathered about the very best in the British Army."—General Sir Stanley Maude.

October 15th, 1914.

"Since I last entered up our movements, we have not managed to push forward much. It's very difficult country to advance over, the deep broad dykes and ditches make it very bad. Add to this these hard fighting Jaegers, and the difficulties are many. We have lost heavily, especially in officers, so much so that the Royal Scots this morning were commanded by a Second Lieutenant, so Thorpe has gone out to take over Command of them.

The French cavalry on our left are very little good. They naturally hate fighting on foot, and it's a pitiful sight to see these huge Cuirassiers in their "tin tummies" going to attack or to hold trenches. Imagine the gentlemen outside Whitehall going to attack on foot in full-dress uniform; this is 1914, not 1814, and yet the French are dressed more or less the same as they were then!

General McKenzie turned up to-day to take over Command, and brings with him two A.D.C.'s. I fear I must therefore retire to the Battalion again. I think I shall try to get to the 1st Battalion, as I believe they are shortest of officers. It's tiresome, just as I have got settled down here, and I don't know what to do with 'Viscount,' General Hammy's old horse which he loved

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so dearly, and there is Lindsay too who wants to stay with me.

"His grave looks quite tidy. While I was there to-day a French inhabitant of the village offered me his 'own' cross which he kept by him in his house ready for his own grave (a really cheery sort of thing to keep in one's bedroom). I didn't like to say 'no,' so it's been put up, and is a terrible ornate affair of wood, but will do well enough till I get another ready."

October 19th.

"I am to stay on for the present, but don't feel very overjoyed at the prospect. I shall stay on as long as they need me and then go back. I think I should go now if it wasn't for 'Viscount.'

"On Friday we moved from Lacouture to this place—Neuve Chapelle."

October 25th.

"The last few days have been very busy. After a good deal of consideration it was agreed that our former and forward line was too extended to hold, and we were and are too weak to shove ahead, so now we are back on a strong position, which we dug before withdrawing. The turn of the tide of our advance was clearly shown by the almost complete loss of the Royal Irish in La Pilly. Apparently they pushed on too far, and were heavily attacked and surrounded. There were about seventy survivors all told: a bad business.

The Germans have been following up their attack on La Pilly with further attacks, and they are evidently strongly reinforced, but so far they have done no good to themselves and we have killed a lot of them. The arrival of some of their beastly heavy artillery has begun to make things nasty for us though, and we have by no means got off scot-free. Of course our Headquarters has had to shift back again to Lacouture, a place I hoped to have seen the last of, and not one of very happy memories.

Cornwall and I are now great allies—he is in the R.F.A.—and is here as Intelligence Officer. He speaks goodness knows how many languages, and is as brave a

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fellow as ever I've met. He is keen too, and that's always good. On Thursday (22nd) he and I went out to try and get some information about the situation on our extreme left at Fauquissart. The night before, Wednesday 21st, there were rumours of Germans massing there, so at 5.30 a.m. we motored out, and leaving the car some way back walked up to the trenches. It was a misty but fine morning.

Cornwall and I decided to go forward to the house marked B [1] to see what we could see; it was about 100 yards in front of our trenches. We got up there all right, and it seemed deserted enough. I was just going upstairs to make certain, when out of the mist (which was now clearing off) we heard a loud and clear 'auf,' 'auf.' Cornwall said this was German for 'up,' 'up,' and there sure enough a few hundred yards off were some advancing figures unmistakably German, doubling forward in no particular formation, and keeping as much under cover as possible. Cornwall and I cleared back. The Germans at once stopped and took cover when we opened fire, and then continued to advance again one by one with 'short rushes.'

"Eventually they began to build up a firing-line about 300 to 400 yards off. They were extraordinary hard to see against the mist, for the grey-green uniforms they wear are an excellent colour. I got my telescope out and marked down one bold fellow with great care. He was hiding behind a turnip which had a very leafy top to it. I then pointed this out very carefully to Cornwall, who had a shot at the place. I saw the shot strike short, so we put up the sight fifty yards and he fired again. I, with my eye glued to the telescope, saw a violent movement behind the turnip. We might have had some really pretty shooting, and I was longing for my shooting specs, but we had to get back to make our report.

"That night (the 22nd) the Germans made one of their heavy attacks all along our front. Everywhere we repulsed the attack easily and with heavy losses, except south of Fauquissart cross-roads. . . . At dawn next

[1] He illustrated his Diaries with numerous sketches full of detail, and beautifully drawn. Lack of space forbids their reproduction.—[Ed.]

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morning Cornwall turned up . . . examined all the dead Germans, taking all their papers to examine later . . . nearly every German keeps some form of diary, which I think goes to show the higher education of the Germans compared to our men.

"A good many of these Germans had been bayoneted —horrid wounds they make do our bayonets—and they must have put up a good fight. It is all rot the stuff one reads in our papers about the inferiority of the German soldiers to ours; if anything, the German is the better, for though we undoubtedly are the more dogged and *impossible* to beat they are the more highly disciplined. Of course here we are up against some of their best regiments.

"Most of the dead Germans had got stiff during the night, and it was difficult to get papers and things off them. I had no idea a man was so unwieldy when dead. I don't think I have ever handled a dead man before; somehow one doesn't mind out here, for death loses most of its terrors and awesomeness. Their equipment was very good, and the amount of ammunition these fellows were carrying is extraordinary; even some of their pockets were filled with it, and also their packs, which are made of untanned cow-hide.

"The officer was interesting. His name was Lieutenant Meyer Zu Wambergen, and he was Adjutant of the 57th Regiment. I noticed that he had on the ribbon of the Iron Cross, which he wore between two buttons, so I searched him carefully and found the Cross in his purse, very 'bluggy.' Unfortunately, he had no diary. He died an Iron Cross death all right, leading his men inside the enemy's line. He had a Frenchman's sword and field-glasses. I wonder if I shall ever have the chance of finding out more about him.

"This morning (the 25th) Cornwall and I were sent off to try and find out exactly how things were going in Neuve Chapelle, which had been constantly attacked from the Bois de Biez, and where the Germans had apparently got a hold on parts of our trenches. Which part or parts though was not very clear.

"We went by car to where I have marked X on the sketch, and where we had to leave the car owing to the

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fact that a German 11-in. shell had pitched right on to the road. It knocked a hole about ten feet deep, and to get along the road one had to walk in the ditch. It was just as well we did leave the car, as it turned out. On leaving it we turned into a ploughed field to walk across the corner straight to the village. After going not very many yards bullets began to 'zip' over, but we didn't bother, as we thought they must only be stray ones.

"A few yards farther on, though, we came to the conclusion that whether stray or not, they were beginning to come unpleasantly close, and in addition there were big bits of 11-in. shell singing by us. The actual bursts were a good 600 yards off (on the line of our trenches), so they had some way to come. One very nasty bit about an inch thick and horrid jaggy landed close to us, and it was so hot that I couldn't hold it with comfort.

"Eventually we decided that things were rather unhealthy, and we came to the conclusion that all the bullets were not stray ones, and just as we both thought this we also realised that we were near the middle of a very flat ploughed field; by good fortune, however, there was a turnip stack not many yards off ('A'), so we got to it quick and got under it and felt happier. There was then no doubt that we were being fired at, and not from a great distance either, for whenever we tried to look over the top or round the edge 'zip' came a bullet. Evidently some snipers or sniper had, during one of their night attacks, found their or his way through our lines by accident or intent, and now lay up in one of the houses marked 'C.'

"We tried to spot them through our glasses, but found it unwholesome, so we were rather hard up to know what to do. Tummy crawling seemed the only solution. There was another pile about fifty yards off, and Cornwall set off for this and I followed. We got there without being seen, I think. We then decided to run for it to the road, where we knew there was a ditch. I went first this time, and got there without being fired at. Cornwall followed and got two shots after him, while I sat laughing at him from the depths of my ditch.

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They followed us up along the road, so we decided for home, the whole place being too 'busy.'

"We returned by making a detour behind, and even there we were unlucky, for a stray 'crump' or 'crumpet' came yelling along, and burst about twenty yards off, covering us with mud. We had both somehow found ourselves lying in a very shallow little ditch, and I couldn't help thinking while I was there that really 'crumps' were very little worse in effect than my operations with gelignite on the old chestnut tree at Chartley. We got back to the car all right, having done nothing of any value, but it adds a zest to life, this new work. We must get those snipers cleared out somehow or other."

October 27th.

"It was Sunday yesterday. I quite forgot the fact till I opened this book to-day. Nothing definite has happened. The Germans seem quite determined to break through us at Neuve Chapelle, and their efforts get more and more vicious. The Battalions of the 7th Brigade, who are holding these trenches, are nearly done for, for this incessant shelling with these big shells is very terrible. They have hardly any officers left, and the men are few and rather nerve-broken. It's getting on for three weeks' hard and continuous fighting now, always under fire by day and driving off desperately hard pushed attacks by night. Our men are really wonders, but things begin to go ill now; trenches are lost and then retaken a few hours later, each time fewer men, and the devil is we have no fresh troops to shove in to help. However, I suppose all comes right in the end.

"On the 25th the Germans bombarded our trenches especially heavily (while Cornwall and I were up there being played with by that sniper), and I've never seen a better display of explosive destruction. There were shells bursting in the village and around it twenty and thirty to the minute, each shell sending up columns of black and pink smoke 50 feet into the air and making the whole place shake and jump. The whistle and crash of 'em seemed incessant. Each hole they made was big enough to put the 'Ford' into and lose it! We were

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600 yards off, and it was plenty close enough. The actual trenches being outside the village of course escaped a good deal, but in several places all semblance to a trench was gone, and the inmates would be buried free of trouble, and yet the others stuck it out, and were ready to shoot more Germans when the shelling finished and the attack began."

October 29th.

"My word, we did have an interesting day yesterday. Nearly too interesting.[1] Last night I was so dead-dog tired that I could hardly bother to take my boots off. These sketches will show how things were at dawn yesterday morning, at midday and at 6 p.m.

At about nine Cornwall and I reached the house marked 'A' on first sketch and left our horses and grooms there, taking two orderlies on with us to carry back messages. We went straight along to the little house marked 'B,' and spent some time there, as we were anxious to try and find out where the Germans had been lying up who tried to snipe us that day, and though we were again sniped at close range, not a sign of a German could be seen. We knocked a hole in the roof for the telescope, but in spite of the fact that a bullet smashed the tiles close to this hole and not far from my head, we could see nothing. It was most uncanny. We had to give it up at length, the only German we could see being a dead one in the middle of the field. We went up the ditch to Pont Logy, and here could see Indian Infantry sitting ready to advance, and also found 400 men of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade in reserve.

"We knew all this, of course, so after talking for a few minutes to 'Chaser' Forsyth and the Cavalry (Geoff. Phipps Hornby was there), Cornwall and I went off down a very deep and muddy ditch to 'C' (we were to know that ditch a bit better by night!) to await the bombardment. There was a little rifle shooting going on, but nothing serious.

"At 'C' we found a few men in the 'auberge' there, and two gunner subalterns, who said they were observers. They were in a hopeless place for observing from, having

[1] A British counter-attack had been planned for this day.—[Ed.]

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nothing but houses and gardens all round them; in fact, they seemed to be doing 'dam' all.'

"We had only been there a moment when the bombardment started, and for half an hour Neuve Chapelle was a beastly unhealthy place. Every gun we had was turned on to it, and also a Brigade of French 75's under that great little man, Commandant Creuse. We were so close up that we could hardly hear ourselves speak; it was one incessant crashing. A fine sight, the white of the shrapnel and the yellow of the lyddite, also a good deal of black smoke from the Germans, who also chimed in. So we sat there waiting for it to stop and wondering when a shell would come our way. None did, however, and after a bit our guns lengthened their range 500 yards everywhere and the Indians advanced.

"At first Cornwall and I could not find a good place to watch from. We tried several houses. I got a fright at one place. I jumped through a hole in a wall into a little garden and came very near on top of a live German. He was badly wounded though, and making no end of a fuss, grunting and groaning. He had been out there all last night, and when his friends retired they had taken his rifle and had not attempted even to make him comfortable, far less carry him away. His leg was badly shattered, probably by shrapnel. I made him comfortable, and gave him his pack and opened it, but had to leave him where he was, as we were in a hurry. There were two dead Germans there too.

"All the houses were so broken about and there were so many trees and hedges and orchards that finding a place was difficult. We did at length though, and got forward to 'D.' All seemed to be going well. The house we got into was more or less undamaged, and was occupied by two of our wounded men, who certainly ought not to have been there and were hiding in the cellar. It struck me at once that the Native Infantry had very few supports, and that they had very little touch, if any, with the Sappers and Miners on their left, who we heard at this moment already entering the first houses of Neuve Chapelle at the northern end with great and weird yelling. We had a good view.

"To the south we had a good view of the West Kent

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trenches, and they were well held, and we could see the men putting on their equipment, I thought probably preparing to co-operate with the right of the Native Infantry, when the latter got up level with them. The German shrapnel was bursting over these trenches very accurately, but apparently was not doing much damage.

"The Native Infantry suddenly seemed to lose direction; they had been advancing at right-angles to the 'C'–Neuve Chapelle road, but then I suppose came under fire from the German trenches south of 'D' and wheeled to the right. This seemed to take the dash out of the attack. Up till then they had had few casualties, but now began to suffer heavily, and the stretcher-bearers were very busy. They worked splendidly, these latter, but we had little time to watch them.

"Of the Sappers and Miners we could now see nothing, as they were into the village, but we could see Germans retiring in the village, and there also seemed some movement in the German trenches, probably reserves and supports moving in. We had an excellent view of these trenches, and we could see them firing away—at the Native Infantry. Many of their bullets came high and hence in at our windows, which made observation no easier or more pleasant. I felt much more inclined to lie down on the floor.

"By this time the Native Infantry were hung up, and were lying down in a sort of shallow trench about fifty yards from our house and facing the German trenches. How we longed for them to get up and advance in short rushes as white troops would have done. If only they had, I believe they would have got into the Germans. As it was, they started crawling like great khaki slugs, and about the same pace. Fancy starting to crawl 300 or 400 yards from the enemy's trenches! It was an extraordinary sight, looking at it as we were from so close.

"One man I watched—he sort of fascinated me—was a great bearded turbaned fellow. He shoved his rifle along in front of him and crawled just as I've many a time crawled after rabbits. He advanced perhaps a yard a minute. I remember reckoning out that he would at that pace reach the German trenches in about six

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hours! He was going along like this and had just pulled up his right leg to get a shove forward and his arms were stretched out in front of him, when suddenly he seemed to relax and collapse, though the position of his body and limbs did not change. I could hardly believe he was dead, he looked so natural, but dead he was. I suppose shot through the head, for he never moved again.

"After a bit the crawlers began to give up; one after another they were being picked off by the Germans, for the ground was flat, and there was no cover at all, so they began to crawl back to the shallow trench they had left. One big man I suppose considered it beneath his dignity to crawl backwards, so he coolly rose to his feet, picked up his rifle, and walked slowly and steadily back to the trench. I found myself counting the paces he took; I had counted eleven, and twelve would have taken him to safety. He was walking as steadily as he would have on parade, and then suddenly up went his arms and he fell forward flat on his face. I got quite excited wondering if he would get back, but he had hard luck and he never moved again.

"There were many lying there by now, and worst of all there were many officers down; in fact, nearly all the white officers. Things were beginning to look bad, and every minute's delay was a minute gained to the Germans, who had undoubtedly been shaken by the attack, but were now shooting mighty straight and coolly. So Cornwall very gallantly said he would go and try to get them to advance (the Native Infantry, I mean) and off he went. I hardly expected to see him again.

"I dodged back through the houses to send a message to the effect that the attack was hung up, and supports were needed at once, if we were ever going to get the natives on. I got the message off from 'C,' and then got back to the house again at 'D.' The firing was much heavier on my way back, and there were bullets everywhere, or so it seemed! Just as I got to the house a bullet cut the strapping on the inside of my knee and cut the skin; it made me hop about proper for a moment.

"I couldn't see Cornwall anywhere, and the Natives were still in the trench, and all the crawlers who were not dead were also back again, leaving an unpleasant

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line of motionless figures to show how far the advance had got.

"I got a rifle from one of the wounded men and two bandoliers of ammunition and going up to the top window I started trying to pick off some Germans, range about 450 yards. I longed for my spectacles. What I did in the way of damage I couldn't see. There was one German who looked as if he was leaning up against the back of the trench. I could see down to his waist. About five rounds I let off at him, but he didn't seem to care. Eventually I came to the conclusion that he was dead, so kept on sniping at the helmets I could see.

"What I knew would happen did happen. The German shrapnel started to arrive. My word it scared me. It burst beautifully just on a level with the tops of the apple trees in the orchard, where all the stray natives had collected, and where the stretcher bearers were at work. In a few seconds that orchard was a proper little inferno, branches and cut-in-half trees were flying about and the men there were almost wiped out. Horrid it was to see. One poor fellow just below my windows had most of his face torn away. I thought my house might get its turn, so I went down, and as the man was able to walk but couldn't see, I led him back to 'C.' It seemed an awful long way, and the poor fellow's wound was terrible. I don't know why he wasn't dead. We got there all right, and I found that all the telephone wires had been cut, so I could send no further messages through.

"However, I sent my orderly off down the ditch to Pont Logy with a message, saying how things were going. There were no signs of any supports coming up. It was then about 11.30 p.m. I didn't quite know what to do, when suddenly Cornwall appeared, unhurt, and at the same moment a troop of Cavalry came up the ditch from Pont Logy. We arranged that the troop should go up to support the natives, and Cornwall went up to show them the way. We arranged that I should go back along the ditch to find supports of some sort, so off I went.

"German shrapnel was bursting all over the place now, and the ditch was full of wounded and unwounded

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natives. The unwounded were all making for home, and nothing I could do would stop them. I even tried to persuade them with my revolver, and that did send a few back, but I was much hampered by my lack of their language, and they were terrified by the shrapnel. I could only think of two words 'pani' meaning water or bread (?) and 'gelde' meaning quick, and these weren't much use!

"At Pont Logy I found the Cavalry and a lot of officers, who said they had strict orders to stay where they were, so as to occupy a second line of defence. So they were no good, and I went off up the road to Rue des Berceaux. It was comparatively quiet after where I had been, and though there were a few stray bullets coming over, they no longer even bothered me.

"I found the Bedfords—where I've shown them on the first sketch—and they said they couldn't help me, so I went on to Rue des Berceaux, where I found General Maude (G.O.C., 14th Infantry Brigade). I told him all I knew and all I had seen, and he at once said I might have the Cheshires, but seemed very dubious as to their exact whereabouts, and also he knew very little about the situation, which didn't surprise me. He gave me a note for the O.C. Cheshires, and off I went to look for him, taking the opportunity to send off another message to Headquarters, to say what I was going to do. I wasted a precious half-hour before I found the Cheshires, for the guide I had was a fool. However, at last I did find them, sitting in a ditch about 12.20 p.m. All that the Cheshires consisted of was the C.O. and Adjutant, and there was only half a Battalion, the rest being 'lost'! Goodness knows how—the C.O. didn't.

"It wasn't a cheery start off. I got them moving and led them up to 'B,' where I met Cornwall again. He had been hit by a shrapnel bullet on the chin, and three bullets through his Burberry; he was only bluggy though, and quite cheerful. He had got hold of the Bedfords, so we put both Battalions along the road, and started them off in extended order to advance across the field towards 'C' and to support the West Kents, who were now being counter-attacked. We saw them start all right, and it made me laugh to think of Cornwall and

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I, whose united service can't be eight years, playing about with Battalions!

Cornwall then went back to see General Maude, while I returned to Pont Logy, and sent a message back to say what was happening. I found some French Chasseurs had come up, so I put them in to advance up the main road on the Bedfords' left.

"It was about 4 p.m. by now, and I was mighty weary. However, I thought I had best go up to see if any of the West Kents were left, so got into that awful ditch again. There were dead and wounded men all along the ditch, so it was worse than ever to move along. Some of the dead were quite trodden into the mud.

"I went up past 'C' and found the left of the Bedfords on the road as I've shown in the third sketch. They had not had many casualties, and reported that the West Kents were still holding on, so I told them to push on at once and occupy the West Kents' trenches and to get in touch on the left with what was left of the Native Infantry and the troop of Cavalry. I then came back.

"While I was sitting at the bottom of the ditch for a moment's rest, some form of beastly shell landed in the ditch with me, and covered me with lumps and stones. I thought I was dead, but was all right. One man close by said, 'Oh, Gawd, that's a near thing.' I agreed, but it was quite an unnecessary remark. Half-way down the ditch I came across a half-dead native; he was in great pain, shot through the stomach. I was carrying a long native knife. I haven't the vaguest idea of when and where I picked it up, and as I stepped over him he caught hold of my arm and tried to get hold of the knife. When I refused to let him have it, he made signs that I should cut his throat for him, which cheerful job I wasn't for at all, and managed at length to get some French Chasseurs to carry him back to Pont Logy.

"It was getting dark now, and when I got to Pont Logy I found to my horror that the ——'s and ——'s were retiring, goodness only knows why. I felt inclined to sit down and cry, but hadn't time. The men said they had had orders to retire; there were very few officers about. The officer Commanding, a Captain I think he

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was, saluted me, and called me 'sir,' which shows he was pretty far gone. So I ordered him about just as I wanted. I think he was a bit what Geoff. would term 'balmy.'

"Eventually Cornwall and I, after great efforts, got them together and got them started digging on a line shown in the 6 p.m. sketch. As we were standing on the road (it was almost dark) a German machine gun opened fire down the road from the direction of 'C,' which cleared us off the road in no time.

"We saw the digging well started, arranged with the Cavalry to dig themselves in behind, and then felt we had done about all there was to be done, so we went back to our horses—it seemed a year since we left them—and we got on and cantered off down the road. Immediately a machine gun started on us from somewhere over by the K.O.Y.L.I. We fairly flew then, and were soon out of range of the brutes, for the first time since 9 a.m. We went back to the 7th Brigade Headquarters in Richebourg-St.-Vaast, and there found Colonel Maurice and told him everything. He said we had done 'jolly well,' which was good hearing. Oh, but it was a badly run show. If only that attack had been supported we should have got all those trenches back again; as it was, there was a great loss of life and no good done at all. Perhaps I should add here: 'In my opinion'!"

October 31st.

"The Division is gradually being withdrawn, and is being replaced by the Lahore Division. We are to get a rest, and the troops need it. The Neuve Chapelle situation has been more or less put straight.

Before we were pulled out Cornwall and I with six men made a careful search of all the houses down the road to try and find our friend the sniper, but with absolute lack of success. It will always be a mystery to me and is most annoying.

"General Wing, who was made Major-General a few days ago, now Commands. I only hope it is permanent.

"Have just heard that Norman has been killed, some days ago."

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iv. First Battle of Ypres

"I think he was one of the finest gentlemen that ever lived."—The Rev. H. R. L. (Dick) Sheppard.

November 1st, 1914.

". . . We made arrangements for housing the 7th Brigade, and I went up to Richebourg. On the way I met what I took at first to be a drunken man, but found him to be ——, who was Commanding the ——. He was covered with bits of plaster and dust. It turned out that he had been asleep on a bed when a 'crump' landed and burst in his room! How he was not killed I can't think. The first thing he knew was that he was lying in the street under several feet of ceiling, etc. He took me in to see the place he had been asleep in. It was a fearsome sight, everything smashed to blazes, and the bed he was lying on at the time had a great bit of the chest of drawers on it and most of the roof! As I've said, the shock had made him drunk, as it were, and he had to go to hospital.

"Bursting shells do seem to have a curious effect on people. Some are sort of mentally paralysed, and some even physically so. I've seen a man alive and unhurt, but absolutely incapable of lifting a hand or of speaking. It's curious. A few men and horses were killed in the streets, but nothing very serious, and we collected everybody by dark and got them into fresh billets."

November 2nd.

"There being nothing to do, I took a car and went off to find Dads. After some difficulty I found his Headquarters south of Armentières, not far from Croix de Bacs. He was very fit, and had Alan with him as Brigade-Major, Wallace having been badly wounded a few days ago while with Charlie.[1] They were out to look at dead Germans, and promptly got fired on by live ones, Wallace having his leg smashed and Charlie helped to carry him in without getting hurt himself.

[1] His cousin, Lieutenant (now Major) C. R. Congreve, D.S.O., O.B.E.

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Dads and I rode round some of his second-line trenches and then had lunch. Afterwards I set off to find the Battalion, who were in trenches on his right. I walked up along the second line where we had been in the morning till I came to a sort of sunken road. I got shrapnelled *en route,* which was very unkind. Eventually I got up to the Battalion trenches all right. The first person I saw was old Meysey sitting in a dug-out with Snipe, the latter being in Command during the absence of 'Jellunda,' who was on a few days' leave. Meysey looked lovely in a red beard and a woollen cap.

"I next found Charlie, also with a goodish beard on him and looking very fit; also old Martin with a bullet hole in his cap and fatter than ever, and apparently quite pleased with life. At last I found Godders, who had a bad eye but was otherwise all right. It was grand to see him and the others, and to know them to be all right, but it was sad how many good fellows were gone. Poor old 'Norman Boy' and Cherub.

"I had one bad blow. I had gone up quite confident of bringing Harris back with me, and when I got there I heard he was dead, killed ten days ago in an attack. He was shot through the head, I think the same day as Norman.

"Cornwall and I rode in on Saturday morning to H.Q. via Ypres. A civilian stopped us and told us that in the hospital were a lot of wounded Germans, and that there was great difficulty in looking after them, so we found the hospital and went in. There were fifty-three Germans there, all pretty badly wounded and twenty-five civilians, two or three doctors, and a few fat-faced old Belgian nun-nurses. They were in a bad way and full of woe. No water and no bread, as a shell had cut off their water supply, and one had actually burst in their laundry, hoisting the old lady in charge of the washing about 100 yards into the square.

"Alas, we are not going to keep General Wing as our Divisional Commander. General Haldane (lately promoted) has been appointed, and I believe brings two A.D.C.'s with him. So I simply must go now, though Dads has made me promise to stay if I can.

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November 9th.[1]

"5 *p.m.*—Cornwall and I are just back from a visit to Ypres. As usual we drew fire; he and I, when we go anywhere together, always seem to irritate the Germans! No sooner had we gone into the Cathedral—we were really just standing inside the huge doors—when we heard the whistle of a shell coming, and then there was a crash that in the Cathedral sounded tremendous, and a huge hole appeared in the roof and the centre of the building was full of brick and dust and smoke. Another shell followed the first. Neither burst, and the reason for this we discovered later, but they did plenty of damage.

"The Cathedral is a lot more restored than I thought, and the restoration must have been in progress when the War started, as there is a lot of scaffolding still up. We decided to postpone our examination of the inside and left hurriedly. The old verger was dancing about with rage and misery, for these were the first shells to actually hit the building. He wanted to go in to see the damage, but we stopped him; poor old man, it's dreadful for him to see his treasure being slowly knocked to bits, for now they have started I expect they will go on till it is only a ruin. On leaving the Cathedral we went to the Hôtel de Ville or Halle, which is really a lovely old place; the walls are all painted with frescoes, and the old woodwork and stonework would please Edward. No sooner were we inside than 'crash,' and into the very part of the building we were in came another big brute, again not exploding but going through two three-foot walls and making a beastly mess. The third wall stopped its career, and it finished up in a pile of straw (for soldiers had been billeted on the floor). This at once set fire, so we rushed out to get some water and met the 'fire brigade' arriving, consisting of three men, the verger and a boy.

"I didn't at all like the look of the shell, as it was lying there red-hot. If only I had thought a moment I might have realised that a red-hot shell wouldn't explode, but one doesn't always remember little things like that! We put out the burning straw, and then came away before worse should happen, as they now really seem to be going to shell in earnest, and we were only there for 'fun!'

[1] The 3rd Division was now in the line east of Ypres. [Ed.]

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Those Belgian town guards and firemen are gallant fellows; there are only a few who haven't left the town now, and their water supply is mostly cut off and broken, yet whenever a shell arrives they rush off to try and minimise the damage, forgetting or heedless of the fact that one shell usually means another in the same place. I much admired them and their devotion to their old buildings."

November 10th.

"For some days past they have been shelling all along the main road with a very big Howitzer shell. One can't hear him coming a very long way off, but he makes a loud whistle when getting close, and goes off with an awful crash. To-day about 5 p.m. there was a fearful crash, and the whole house seemed to jump about a yard to one side and then sort of stagger back again! There wasn't much left in the way of glass to smash, but what was left came crashing down. Colonel Maurice, who had been leaning over a table by the window looking at a map, got covered in glass, and came out in an awful hurry.

"I really thought they had managed to hit the house at last, but on going to investigate I found that one of these big 'super-crumps' had landed about sixty yards beyond the house. It made a grand hole 13 feet deep and 35 feet across. Horses were tied up all round, but beyond being covered in mud were unhurt.

"This poor château is in a bad way now. Once a nice château villa outside the town, with grounds of its own and a good garden, now everything spoilt everywhere, and to make things better we did our best to-night to set fire to it. We had to have a fire, so lit one in the fire-place, which looked genuine enough, but had a wooden bottom disguised as iron! The silly thing had a chimney too, so it's not our faults. I had to get an axe to get at the beams underneath which had got well alight. There is a good deal of shelling going on."

November 11th.

A proper day this has been, beastly wet and cold, and the fiercest fighting we have yet had. The Guards Corps (Bill's Own) arrived to turn us out and get through to Calais. They haven't yet though. We have traced twelve

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Battalions of it so far: they were told that the infantry of the line could get no farther ahead, so they were being brought up 'to finish us off.' The result has been desperate fighting and the complete failure of the Germans, up to date.

"Before they attacked they gave our trenches and supports and guns the most terrific bombardment. I never have seen the like before. It was one incessant crashing like at Neuve Chapelle but more so—much. The shrapnel played up and down our lines exactly as one waters a line of flowers, backwards and forwards. Also there were heaps and heaps of crumpets, crumps and super-crumps—all over the place they were. This went on till 10 a.m., when a silence fell except for our guns, and the Germans came on. They told us (a prisoner officer did) that they expected to see what was left of our men after the bombardment run, but they were badly shocked, for they were met with bayonets and such musketry 'as they never dreamt could be possible.'

"The attack went on all morning and well into the afternoon, when finally it began to slacken. The wood fighting bewildered the Germans, they lost touch with each other and then lost courage, and finally it grew dark and we still held on all right."

"Our line is now of course a bit different, but not very much so. In all we lost about 300 yards of trenches, which are still held by the Germans.

"Our casualties were heavy though, amongst them being General Shaw, his Staff Captain Harter, and his Signal-Officer Deakin, all hit as the result of the same shell, which burst just outside the door of the little estaminet they were using as H.Q. I was up there a few minutes afterwards, and they were none of 'em bad except Deakin, who had several holes in him. However, they all have to go sick, and Colonel Douglas-Smith of the Royal Scots is Commanding, with Forsyth as Signal-Officer and Crichton as Staff Captain. It's been an anxious day."

November 12th.

"All fairly quiet in the night but for frequent arrivals of 'Weary Willies,' 'Black Marias,' and others of the

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hateful brew. Cornwall and I about 10 a.m. went up to find out how the left of our line (the 9th Brigade) was, as this is where all the heaviest of yesterday's fighting took place. We went up to the château marked 'A,' where we found Courage and his Hussars in the support trench—in the wood just before we reached the château. We found some most cheerful-looking Zouaves in their wonderful trousers and short coats. Some were in dug-outs, and some I believe up in the front trenches, sandwiched in amongst our own men. One had just been awfully badly wounded in the knee and was being helped back. I hope I don't get my knee mushed up like that. I expect his leg will have to come off.

"Cornwall and I got up without being shelled, but we found —— and his men sitting 'mighty small' at the bottom of his trench, and I stood outside talking to him till he said 'For goodness' sake come in' (he always is a little fussy), 'as that's just where they are shelling.' So in I squeezed, and by Jove, no sooner was I down than whizz—bang—came a shrapnel just where I had been, so I felt glad for his fussiness. They kept up this game for hours, —— said, so it looked as if Cornwall and I were fixtures, for I find once one gets into a trench one is never very keen to leave it again if things are happening outside. However, I timed these shells, and they came in bursts of two and three every three minutes, so after we had got all ——'s news we waited till one salvo was over and ignominiously bolted back through the woods. Somehow now I don't mind these various terrors, at least not as much as I did. I suppose one gets used to everything.

"Nothing much doing the rest of the day. No further attacks, but a lot of shelling, as usual. Our men are splendid, but they get dreadfully weary and 'broken.' It's a wonder to me how they do stick this shelling. Oh, if only we hadn't lost so many officers."

November 13th.

"I came in about 9.30 a.m. from Poperinghe, and found that nothing had happened during the night. Colonel Maurice sent me off up here[1] to do temporary

[1] 9th Brigade H.Q. [Ed.]

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Staff-Captain vice Harter, so here I am, in a most uncomfortable windowless house and it's raining and blowing a gale outside. I am quite happy though, and have plenty of work to do, and guess I shan't have much time on my hands. Very heavy shelling going on, also a good deal of rifle fire. Colonel Douglas-Smith is still Commanding the Brigade. He is an unmoved and very pleasant Scotsman, and sits smoking his pipe quite at peace with the world."

November 15th.

"A busy night on the 13th, the whole of our line had to be slightly drawn back owing to the taking and holding of those few trenches by the Germans; units had to be sorted out, for of course everyone was hopelessly mixed up. I was out until 2.30 a.m., and Costeker was out all night.

"Early on the 14th, just after Costeker had come in, we got news that the few skirmishers left in the old trenches had been driven in, and the Germans occupied our old line, and were coming forward to find out the position of our new line. About 10 a.m. we were in our miserable dwelling when a wire came in to say that a trench known as the 'stable trench' had been captured by the Germans, who were now entrenched between the stables and the château. The R.S.F. had been holding this stable trench, and once taken by the Germans our line was easily enfiladed from it. This is exactly what had happened, and things looked dirty.

"All day our men in 'A' and 'B' suffered considerable loss, and at 7 a.m. a counter-attack was arranged for, to retake both stable and trench. The K.O.Y.L.I. were given the job, and the scheme was for them to put sixty picked men behind the château, who at a given moment were to rush round both sides of it and storm the stable and trench. The trenches on the right 'B' were to open a heavy rifle fire at the same time in order to make the Germans think the attack was coming from there.

"At 7 p.m. it started, and the sixty men rushed into the darkness (they had only fifty yards to go) and—never returned. The Germans opened a heavy fire, and I think that our opening fire was a mistake, for it put

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every German in the vicinity on the look-out. What actually happened nobody yet knows—probably most of the storming party were killed or wounded and the rest captured. Anyhow, none came back, and it was horrid sitting still waiting to get news. Eventually a patrol sent from 'B' about midnight reported that the stable and trench were still in German hands.

"The question was now how on earth were we to tackle the brutes. It was absolutely imperative to retake the place by dawn; if not we might once more have to withdraw our whole front. It must be remembered here that we were dealing with dead-tired men and officers; for days they had been shelled and attacked, soaking wet most of the time, and in many cases actually standing in water. Also there were very few officers left. The ground was deep in mud, and in the wood going was terrible, as the shell-fire had made an abatis with all the broken trees and branches, so anything big in the way of a night attack was impossible. Also Artillery could not bring indirect fire on the stable.

"At last, at 3 a.m., it was decided that a field gun was to be brought up to within fifty yards of the stable. It was to fire four rounds into it, and an assault by a small party of the 5th was to go in and take it 'at all costs.' Poor 5th, so battered and weary. Major Yatman, Commanding them, was a tower of strength. I've seldom admired anyone more—he never got downhearted and was ready to go anywhere.

"The field gun was man-handled up through the deep mud that constituted the 'drive' to the château, and was finally got into position just as dawn began to break. It was touch and go, for once dawn broke the gun would have had to be left where it was. However, all went well, the four rounds were duly fired at the dimly outlined stables, and the gunner subaltern swore each round hit the mark.

"It pleases me to imagine the effect on the Germans inside! No sooner was the first round off than a terrific fire was opened by the Germans from all directions, but *not* from the stables! But none hit the gunners, and the gun was safely brought back. The firing of the fourth round was the signal for the 5th 'stormers,' who were

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led by Company-Sergeant-Major Gilmour, and it was completely successful, both stable and trench being retaken. A good show, and my word what a relief it was to us. We sat down to an early breakfast, feeling quite cheerful. Gilmour died of wounds during the day, and too late for him to know of his award of the D.C.M.

"In the fighting for those infernal stables we must have lost 150 men and officers, and the place itself was found to be a shambles. It was a bad night. I was tramping round in the mud and water trying to find people most of the night. The Germans guessed we were going to attack, and kept on firing up lights, which make things as bright as day for a few moments. It was a weird scene, the mud, the woods all smashed about and the lights. I wish I had some dry stockings."

November 15th.

"We have been shelled worse than ever, the shrapnel, crumps, etc., never ceasing. Our house was simply rained on by shrapnel, the shells bursting just outside and the smoke from them drifting in through the broken windows. We sat there, and every moment I expected one to come through the roof: goodness knows how it escaped. Wonderful to relate, nobody was even hit, except two pigs, who were killed two yards outside the back doors. It was an ill wind, for we have had splendid pork chops ever since—shrapnel-killed pork! Quite a new diet!"

November 18th.

"On Monday most of the Brigade were relieved by Cavalry, and we withdrew our H.Q. to Hooge, a few hundred yards down the road. I wasn't sorry to leave our little home, for I bet it will be hit full pitch before long.

"The night before, while Costeker and I were up in the woods arranging reliefs, he was hit. The Germans were very jumpy, and kept on opening rapid fire, and by great ill-luck one bullet hit Costeker in the arm. It must have been a ricochet I think, as it didn't even go clean through. I bound him up with my first-aid dressing, and as we had finished our job we came home and I sent him off to hospital first thing in the morning.

"A new Brigade-Major—Wavell—came out in the

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course of the day, and also Buchanan to take over from me, so I am back here as A.D.C. again. It's been a strenuous few days, and I've seldom been so cold and miserable as I was at times, for I had no change and the weather was vile and our house distinctly airy. If it hadn't been for pork chops I should have been *very* unhappy!"

November 20th.

"Last night the General, Colonel Maurice and I rode off in the snow and dark to see the Brigades. The Germans usually shell the road we have to go by (the main Ypres–Menin road) after dusk, and we had the bad luck to just hit off one of the moments. We had just got down to the level-crossing, a particularly unhealthy spot, when I heard the well-known 'bang' of that infernal field-gun that shoots down the road. It always sounds as if it was only a few yards off, firing straight down between the trees. We heard the bang, pause, then the whistling scream, then crash, and a blaze of white light just over our heads. Nobody was hit, but we decided to wait behind the level-crossing till they gave over, which they did in a few minutes. It's a perfectly beastly sensation being shrapnelled in the dark on a horse. We went up and saw General Gleichen in the château near Hooge, and then General McCracken in the dug-outs.

"It's awful cold, and the snow is thick on the ground. This morning we were up and riding out into the dark as usual (about 6 a.m.) and it was already snowing. These last days it has steadily been getting colder and colder, and now there is an inch of snow and a hard frost as well. My word it *is* cold, and for the poor devils in the trenches it must be terrible. When we went to see them this morning they were all terribly stiff, and some were so numbed and rheumaticky that they could only just hobble, and some actually had to be lifted out of the trenches and carried back. What a deal of misery this Kaiser has caused.

"At last we are being relieved, by the French, and go off to rest and get up to strength again. I believe we go to Westoutre, half-way to Bailleul."

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V. KEMMEL AND THE SCHERPENBERG

"Apart from his personal charm he was for his age and experience in my humble opinion the finest soldier we had out here, and his untimely death is a loss to the whole Army."—LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR HERBERT UNIACKE.

November 21st, 1914.

"We managed to get the reliefs finished last night. I had been out all day taking French officers round to arrange the taking over. They struck me as being wonderfully quick and sure of themselves. I had lunch at a regiment's headquarters near Poperinghe, and a very good lunch it was too. The little Colonel was most charming. He said he thought I was very young to be doing the work I was, which rather offended me. All the taking over went off without a hitch, and we were mighty glad to turn our backs on the Ypres salient, never, I hope, to see it again.

"I left our château about 7 a.m. in a car, and went to this place, Mont Noir Château, via Westoutre. It's a big house right on top of a long steep ridge of hills that runs from Cassel to Kemmel. It must be a pretty place in summer.

"I have a bed in 'La Chambre de Madeleine,' and be she young or old she has her bed decorated with white ribbons. However, I guess I shall sleep none the better or worse in consequence! She has left behind a big bottle of 'eau de Cologne,' which is kind of her."

November 22nd.

"General Haldane and his A.D.C. Fraser have arrived. He wants me to stay on as his other A.D.C. Both seem quite nice. General Wing is off on ten days' leave home, and is as pleased as Punch over it. I do wish he wasn't leaving us, but of course he is more at home with guns and gunners."

November 23rd.

"Very quiet days these. We ride or motor off in the morning to see our war-worn warriors, presenting various medals to those who are left to get them, and various Generals turn up and tell them how splendid they are,

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including Sir John French, who came out to-day and waded round in the mud. The men look better already; shaving and washing and plenty of sleep work wonders."

November 25th.

"We are going to keep the château as our night headquarters and use the Scherpenberg Hill as a day headquarters. This latter is a high conical hill with a windmill and farm on top of it, and one gets an excellent view of Wytschaete and Messines and Ypres, and on a real clear day one can even see as far as the sea somewhere near Ostend."

November 28th.

"We took over a part of the line last night. We now have one Brigade in the front line and the other two in reserve, so each man has only three days in the trenches and six in billets, just as the Germans and French do. Always so far we have had to have the whole Division in the front line, with the result that the men never get any rest at all. So this new departure is a great improvement.

"*The* great difficulty (a universal one at the present time) is the mud and water. Some of the trenches are always flooded, and the ground is so spongy that drainage is nearly impossible. We are trying all sorts of dodges to get rid of the wet—brushwood, planks, sacks filled with straw, pumps, and lastly, barrels. The latter are really the best—beer barrels sawn in half with seats nailed across the top, and each man has one to stand on or sit in! It's a miserable type of existence though, bad for morale and bad for health. However, it must be as bad for the Germans—please goodness it *is*.

"My word, but the Scherpenberg is an awful cold place. Every bit of wind hits it and all the winds in the world seem to live and have their being in this corner of Belgium. However, the view is worth being cold for, and when in the farm we keep warm enough."

November 29th.

"Feeling rotten to-day, an awful sore throat. Fraser comes back to-night. Nothing doing on our front, except sniping and shelling. I am going to take to bed."

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December 3rd.

"The King is going up the Scherpenberg to-day. I wish I could go and cheer too."

December 4th.

"I have been in bed these last few days, but have only missed King George and no operations. I believe it must be this filthy water that gave me my throat. I got mighty fed up with Madeleine's bed, though glad enough to be there the first two days."

December 5th.[1]

"Left Mont Noir in René's car at 7 a.m. and reached Boulogne at 10.30. It was an awful drive, so wet. The boat left at 11, and at 3.30 I walked into Queen Anne's Gate, where Brown showed absolutely no surprise, and at once offered to get the bath ready! I shall leave this alone now. E. H.[2] will be in presently, and this is a war diary. It *is* rather gloriously wonderful to be home again, and such a bath did I have. I fairly boiled myself clean in it."

December 14th.

"Left London at 1 p.m. and got here[3] at 9.15 p.m. Again Duval's car was at my service and brought me up here. Too weary to write to-night; it's rather awful being back again, in a way."

December 15th.

"I had a good time in London in spite of doctor and dentist, and am now very fit again.

"Yesterday we made an attack, and as we only put two Battalions into it the attack naturally failed and we had about 400 casualties. It is very depressing. I should have thought we learnt our lesson at Neuve Chapelle about unsupported attacks. But it seems not."

December 19th.

"Rain and wind still are the order of the day and the trenches are desperate with water and mud.

"Owing to the country being so flat the drainage

[1] He was sent on leave at this date against his will and owing to his throat. [Ed.]

[2] Edward Hudson. [Ed.]

[3] Mont Noir Château.

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question is very difficult, open drains, having little or no 'fall,' get waterlogged at once, communication trenches become as bad. In some cases these get so bad that men have been drowned in them. I was told the following by an officer a few days ago—he belongs to the 27th Division:

"The Company was going up to do a relief, at night of course, and on completing the relief the Company Commander found a man was missing. A short search was made without results, and it was concluded he had stopped one of the many stray bullets going about, as they always are. Two days later this same Company was relieved, and while moving back again in the dark, groans were heard, and eventually traced to a disused water-logged communication trench, where the missing man was found, up to his shoulders in mud and quite incapable of movement. He had got into the trench in the dark by mistake, went in up to his knees, floundered along a few yards when he went to his waist, and there he stuck and gradually sank. It took them four and a half hours to get him out, and then he died about ten hours later from 'exhaustion and exposure.' It is quite likely that many a 'missing' man has met a similar fate, which is a horrid thought.

"As I've said, we have tried most ways of overcoming the difficulties; in order to form a firm 'bottom' to the trench we have put in brushwood, sacks of straw, timber, ammunition boxes, etc., but all are gradually swallowed up under the men's feet. In many cases the dead French and German soldiers are found buried in the parapets and walls and bottoms of trenches; in one particular place in our line (I have not seen it) there is a trench called 'dead boot ditch,' and one is shown by the inmates with some pride a protruding Boche's foot where it sticks out from the side of the trench. Everyone is quite friendly with the gruesome boot, and even if they wished to are quite unable to extricate it and re-bury its owner!

"It's interesting to think what a section of one of these trenches will look like when dug up in years to come by some research party—dead British, German and French soldiers, rifles, equipment, bully beef, biscuits, spades, ammunition, 'Tickler's' jam—all mixed up with wood and straw and mud and forming various strata.

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"The best things to keep the men dry are sawn-in-half beer barrels. The men float about in these, and an excellent picture of this is in this week's *Country Life*—on my suggestion!"

December 21st.

"Tom Holland was up to-day (for lunch!). He is very amusing, and gave us some news of the scrap the Indians had at Givenchy. They were driven right back on their second line, but managed to reorganise there, and eventually got themselves re-established.

"It's hailing now and beastly cold. Yesterday a man of the 5th Bavarian Regiment (Reserve) was brought in badly wounded and exhausted. He had been wounded on the 14th, and had been lying out in the Petit Bois since then. On being wounded he managed to crawl into a dug-out a yard or two in front of our trenches, and there he lay groaning most horrid. Our fellows at night tried to bring him in, but the fool made such a squealing when they tried to move him that he had to be left where he was, for each squeal brought a heavy fire from the Germans, who were only a few yards off. Our men threw him food, and they say he liked bull's-eyes best. On the 20th a doctor managed to give him morphia, and they got him in by crawling out and tying a rope round him and then hauling him into our own trench, whence he was taken to the hospital, where Cornwall saw him and reported him cheerful in spite of five bad wounds. I hope all Germans don't die so hard."

December 23rd.

"Fog and snow. Cornwall is spending the day in the trenches. I am bored."

December 24th.

"Very heavy firing going on near Ypres. General Bouchy on our left sent to find out if it was us. We thought it was him! But sound is very deceptive in the fog, and this we have to-day, as thick as a blanket."

December 25th.

"The War Diary sums up the day pretty well; it says: 'Foggy and quiet.' The fog is bad and it's cold too, with

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the roads hard frozen. At breakfast we each got a card from the King and Queen, a very nice one too. The men are especially pleased. They had of course heard about the 'Princess Mary's' gift, but this Xmas card was kept very secret.

"We have issued strict orders to the men not to on any account allow a 'truce,' as we have heard rumours that they will probably try to. The Germans did try; they came over towards us singing, so we opened rapid fire on to them, which is the only sort of truce they deserve.

"*Later.*—We have had a great Xmas dinner—oxtail soup (from a tin), fillet of beef with macaroni, *oie rôti*, plum pudding (on fire), and caviare, and champagne and port to drink. The *chef* quite rose to the occasion. It's not been a bad Xmas Day, but I hope the next I shall spend at home."

New Year's Day, 1915.

"Again some of the enemy tried to be friendly, and came out opposite the Lincolns' trenches. They must have been drunk. The Lincolns opened rapid fire with great success! There is a good deal more shelling by the enemy than usual, but nothing else of interest doing."

January 22nd.

"To-day a 6-in. German shell pitched into a house just outside Kemmel. It killed a woman and child and badly injured a little girl, the fault of the Belgian civil authorities. They go on letting these people live quite close up to the front line, and so of course they get killed besides being badly in the way. One actually sees them working in the fields less than 1,000 yards from our trenches. My word, they are fine farmers, these Belgians. One farm labourer does the work of four of his British counterpart, and everything is marvellously looked after. I wish we had some like them to get to work at Chartley." [1]

February 7th.

"I have seen old Kinkie,[2] who is much the same as ever, and Reggie Hargreaves, who is very happy and I

[1] His home, Chartley Castle, Staffordshire. [Ed.]
[2] His uncle, Major A. M. King, Rifle Brigade. [Ed.]

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hear a splendid fellow in every way. I hope he is all right, but I hear is disgustingly brave, so I suppose is certain to get hit sooner or later, as it's always the best who seem to be hit."

February 9th.

"We had a royal visit yesterday—King Albert turned up. We had a guard of honour for him and did the polite properly. He looks quite a king, and seemed a very nice one too. He was very interested in all we pointed out for him from the top of the hill. He had never seen this corner of his kingdom before, and it must have been a very sad thing for him to see. It was a most lovely day, the best we have had since King George was up here, and the view was wonderfully clear.

"To celebrate the occasion we started a Visitors' Book, and caught the King, Prince of Wales and Alexander of Teck. Sir John French also came up, so we had a great collection of the leading lights. I like the Prince of Wales; he is very quiet and small and slight looking, but has a sense of humour. Sir —— had just got a very smart new limousine car, and he told me he had told Sir —— that it was certainly '*un automobile de cocotte,*' and that Sir —— hadn't quite seen the joke! It certainly was very luxurious, satin and all sorts of luxuries."

February 10th.

"Out at the hill all day. Sir Bruce Hamilton came up to see us; he is absurdly like General 'Hammy' in voice and manner. He was very nice, and says I may keep 'Viscount,' though in General H.'s will he was left to someone else.

"Our sick returns of the Division show that our convalescent homes do much good, as it is much the lowest in the whole army, the sick return I mean. The men go to these homes and get a complete change of *everything,* their rifle and all equipment is taken to a store to be cleaned and put away, the men go straight into a bath, and then are given hospital clothing. They stay in the home a week or ten days and are provided with games, books, sweets, tobacco, and in fact are made as happy as can be. If they need medical treatment they get it, as

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the home is in charge of a medical officer, and when ready to go back to the Battalion they get a new outfit to go back clean and rested to the trenches. Our 'home' holds about 150 men and 6 officers, and the General himself supplies a lot of the 'comforts.'

"*Later.*—Have just got a wire from Dads: 'Maurice very seriously wounded, doctor says no hope.' 10 p.m."

February 12th.

"I went over as soon as I could, about 8.30 a.m., yesterday to Armentières and went straight to the hospital I knew Godders to be in. I found Wyatt (his servant) looking after him. Godders looked awful bad, paralysed all down his right side and quite unconscious, but his left arm and leg were moving up and down continuously. I stayed nearly an hour and felt hopelessly useless. Wyatt told me that when hit he was helping to build up the parapet at a place he had just been warned of as being watched by a certain sniper. The bullet went in at the top of the head, and besides breaking a bit of his skull away it has seriously injured his brain. I spoke to the doctor, who said that there was really no chance, and that he thought he would only live twenty-four hours.

"I spent the rest of the morning with Dads, who still has a bit of asthma. He was of course very cut up about Godders, and so was and is Tom Grenville; in fact, we are all miserable. I again went to see him in the afternoon, but he was just the same. Neville Talbot was there too, and when he spoke to Godders loud, he opened his eyes, but they looked quite vacant. Tom motored back with me, and a wire has just come to say that they are moving Godders into Bailleul."

February 13th.

"Went down to No. 2 Clearing Hospital at 6 a.m. He was being much better looked after by very nice nurses, and his bed was more comfortable. He seemed better himself too. Everyone still seems to think there is no hope, but somehow I believe there is. Sir Anthony Bowlby, the big specialist, saw him to-day, and said he

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thought there was no hope, and at any rate there was no chance of his ever getting back the use of his right side."

February 19th.

"Each morning and evening I've been down to the hospital. He seems gradually to be regaining consciousness, but it's dreadfully slow, and he hasn't spoken yet. He eats a good deal though, and is very strong."

February 22nd.

"Went to see Godders and took the Padre with me. I am afraid he was not so well, he certainly looked worse, and the doctors say he is decidedly so. They fear that the wound is turning septic.

Went on to Armentières. Found Dads very well and also Charlie Swan and Tom Grenville and Alan as well.

I found I was mentioned [1] and of course Dads was too. Our names came together, the list being alphabetical.

I got a lot of news of the 3rd Battalion; they are terribly changed since I left them. In November it was bad enough, now there are only a few I know."

February 25th.

"This morning we woke up to find the snow thick on the ground. It was wonderfully beautiful looking out over the country to the south from Mont Noir; there were wicked great red and black clouds, and everything covered in a red light.

"We were just sitting down to lunch to-day when suddenly Hamilton turned up with a lovely lady, the first woman other than 'natives' I've seen out here. A simultaneous exclamation of 'Good Lord' broke from us! She turned out to be Mrs. or Miss (?) Mary Roberts Reinhart, an American who had come out to look round in her capacity as journalist. She was very amusing, and we gave her lunch. I don't think she much appreciated our sour red wine of the country. 'Reminds me of eating a persimmon,' she said (whatever that might be).

"We told her all we could, and she told us how America regarded the War. She had just seen King Albert. She was granted a private interview; the people

[1] In Despatches.

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there told her to 'take great care how I should behave myself, how I was to bob my head and not go nearer than six feet and all that, and I went into the room where he was standing by the fire and we shook hands in silence and he said nothing and I said nothing, for I had been told on no account to speak first, and at last I had to say something, so I said, "Well, you know, it's you who have to speak first."' Apparently this made the King laugh, and the rest of the interview was most successful. Her description of it was most amusing. She talked about twice as fast as most people, and with a strong 'twang.' She leaves for America to-morrow, 'if these submarines will let me.'

"*Later.*—I have just got back. The Padre tells me that Maurice died quite peacefully at 12.30. I knew this before I saw him. I feel I don't much care what happens now."

February 27th.

"I went down to Bailleul this morning and met Dads and Tom Grenville at the hospital. We buried Maurice in the cemetery. P. T. and Maurice Wingfield came too. The coffin was carried in a motor ambulance and we walked behind. The funeral made little or no impression on me, which is either because I have lately learned to understand or else forgotten how to."

February 28th.

"General Wing has gone to Command a new Division at home. Cornwall has gone to the 2nd Corps, Dundas home, Tandy to G.H.Q., and Colonel Maurice to G.H.Q. I shall soon be the oldest inhabitant!

"Have just heard a rumour that the whole Division is to move up to Ypres again. It's damnable in a way of course, a move is always bad, and the Ypres salient is such a hell too. However, I suppose we must not grouse. The next few days may mean a bit of work, which is a blessed prospect, for I am sick to death of this life."

March 5th.

"Roger Owen and I motored over to-day to Armentières to find Dads. He was very fit and cheerful. Sir

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Henry Wilson turned up for tea, and was like a sort of delightful whirlwind. I do admire him, more than anyone I know, I think. After tea eight war correspondents turned up, much to everyone's horror! Ashmead-Bartlett was one of them. Dads is taking them round his trenches this evening; it's about an even-money chance on one of them getting hit or lost in a water-logged trench!"

March 12th.

"We are full of preparations for an attack on Spanbroek Molen.

"Now it's nearly midday, and the fog is so dense that we can do nothing at present.

"*Later.*—About 2 p.m. we got orders to commence the bombardment and attack at once, whether the mist was lifting or not. So it took place. The shelling went on for about forty minutes, and then the attack went in and failed. Apparently our shelling did too little damage, and the Wilts never got home at all, being held up by machine guns and rifle fire; the Worcesters got into one bit of German trench, but found it unoccupied. They stayed there for several hours and were told then to withdraw, bringing nothing with them to show as a result of the attack but a meerschaum pipe. We lost about 400 men and 20 officers, and *did no good at all*; even as a feint to prevent reserves moving south I doubt if it was effective, and the Germans must have seen the weakness of it. However, it was ordered to be done, and there is no more to be said about it. We are all rather depressed though."

Copy of a Letter
(Censored by the Padre)

"'*March* ——. DEAR MOTHER,—I write in answer to your kind and welcome letter which I received this morning. . . . We are having some fine weather now, and the roads are dry for once. I am glad to say that I have got a nice piece of shamrock in my cap—as you know it's the day—but I cannot get drunk as I have no money. I wonder if you could send me a small bottle of whisky and pack it in a cake, so that they will not know

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where it is. Please put on the outside of the parcel "Contents one cake, and fags and chocolate" instead of telling them what's in it. That is the way all the boys get them through, you know. I go to Church every Sunday, and it's beautiful to hear the French people sing. I think I will close my short letter now, so good-night and God bless you. I remain your loving son TEDDY.' (Here followed about fifty x's.)

"What good indeed is St. Patrick's Day to an Irishman if he can't get well and truly drunk!"

March 14th.

"We got back from the Scherpenberg about 5 p.m. and had just got ready for tea when a terrific bombardment started somewhere up in the 27th Division area (our immediate left). It was the heaviest I have heard since Ypres days. Until about 5.30 we got no news, and then heard that the 27th Division 'were being very heavily shelled at St. Eloi.' Apparently some of our trenches were blown up, and under cover of the bombardment the German Infantry rushed in, and now it's 10 p.m. and we have heard that apparently we have lost about seven lengths of trench and the village. This is rather serious. All the moves are cancelled (we were going to have extended southwards to-night) and General Snow has ordered a counter-attack. The 4th Rifle Brigade and Princess Pat's L.I. are to do it. I expect this German attack is really only to draw off our attention and forces from Neuve Chapelle."

March 15th.

"As far as we can make out from the scanty news that has come in, the counter-attack has not been successful. We only got back one of our original trenches and the Germans still hold all the rest we lost and have also established themselves on the Mound. There are, however, no Germans in the village, which is in our hands.

"I have just heard that poor old Kinkie [1] was killed in St. Eloi this morning. He must have been leading the counter-attack, so what better fate could one ask. Many

[1] His uncle, Major A. M. King. [ED.]

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other good riflemen were also killed—and Reggie and Moses both hit.

"We were firstly told that all the trenches had been retaken, but of course that is not so. I believe Stopford-Sackville (Tiger) actually got on to the Mound and killed a German machine-gunner there, which was a very fine performance. I am always hearing tales of his gallantry."

March 16th.

"In the afternoon I motored over to Sailly, which is not far from Armentières, with George Cory. We went to see his young brother, who is in some Canadian regiment. When we got to the Canadian Division H.Q. we found that Bob Cory was in the trenches, so we went up there. The trenches consist of very good breastworks with the Germans 200 to 400 yards off. We hold our line very weakly there; in fact, the Colonel of the Battalion told me that he was holding 5,000 yards of front, but this of course was an exaggeration. They were a very cheery, fine-looking lot, and as keen as anything. Their trenches were quite amusing, all the dug-outs and little forts and bridges had boards up with their names on them, such as 'Grand Hotel Ottawa' and 'Niagara Bridge'! There was but little shooting going on, though as we came away in the dusk the Germans turned on a machine-gun down the road, which wasn't pleasant.

"The country there is so flat that it's easy to get about in daylight. We walked up to within 150 yards of the fire trenches along the road, then through a ruined house and down a well-made communication trench, a very different matter to our almost unapproachable line."

March 17th.

"*St. Patrick's Day.* Kennedy sent me some shamrock, also Joe, so I had plenty and sent some out to all the Irishmen I could find on the Staff, much to their joy. I also planted a bit in a pot. I wonder will it grow. Cameron is very dubious, saying he knows it will never grow out of Irish soil, but as he is a bigoted Scotsman I think he is probably wrong. In the morning I went over to Armentières and found that Dads was up in the trenches.

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"Such a lovely day it was, quite a hot sun, so Tom and I set off to find him. It's a funny business going up to the front trenches there; you walk out of Armentières, which is a big place with slums, into a flat arable country with hardly any hedges. As one passes the last building —in which there sat a fat old lady comfortably knitting —one could see the trenches about 800 yards off, and one solemnly walks down the high-road towards them. It's most uncanny why nobody 'snipes,' but the fact remains that they don't. We walked right up and into the breastwork trenches, which are a maze of parapets, parados and communications. They were fairly dry and well boarded, and I think the average distance from the Germans was about 200 yards. The wire on both sides was extremely thick, the accumulation of months.

"Tom and I, after much wandering, which is exactly like being in a maze, for one can see out neither to right nor left, found Dads and Alan, and after a little more inspection we walked back along another road to the town, apparently in full view of Mr. German. It beats me why they don't shoot; it wasn't till we were nearly back at the town that some more enterprising Boche woke up and sent a few poor shots our way. The trenches there are a revelation to me and beat ours into a cocked hat.

Dads was well and happy, and we had a happy afternoon.

Reggie is worse hit than I at first thought. They all say in the 27th Division how wonderfully well he did, and was as brave as man can be. General Snow says he hopes to get him the D.S.O., for if he lives his soldiering days are done, I fear."

March 20th.

"I heard from A. F., saying that on Monday week (the 8th that would be) she suddenly felt very anxious for me. It's curious, as it was the very day the General and I were nearly caught in the car outside Kemmel. I suppose there is some sort of 'intelligence' about that one can't well realise or understand."

March 22nd.

"'Viscount' is lame, a slight overreach. It's my birth-

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day, and I got many and pleasant letters and two huge cakes from Zoe and Nancy Lane. Went over to Armentières for tea, taking Nancy's cake with me. All well there. John Shea [1] motored me back to Bailleul in the evening, and I went in to see Reggie. He is again better, and they think now he will pull through. He is so maimed though, yet I feel he is the splendid sort of fellow who will bear it well and have a happy enough life."

vi. St. Eloi

"He will be remembered especially as giving the best example consistently of skilful and useful bravery in this War."—Lieutenant-General Sir G. M. Harper.

March 23rd, 1915.

"We are to take over the 27th Division line, which of course embraces St. Eloi. What joy! it means leaving our château and the Scherpenberg, which will be sad, though doubtless a change will be mighty wholesome for all of us."

March 28th.

"We have taken over our new line. We have huge working parties down nightly and thousands of sandbags are filled and laid. The Germans probably are doing the same thing, for everything is fairly quiet, and that, combined with a really good moon, makes the work a good deal easier.

"Everything is fairly quiet on this front, and now that the weather is so improved everyone is much more cheerful. I hear that some of Kitchener's Army is coming out very shortly and I suppose that will mean a general advance. Perhaps Cornwall and I will yet dine in London on May 27th! But I must say I doubt it. I remember three months ago we were quite confident of its possibility."

April 7th.

"We moved our Headquarters to Renninghelst to-day, and it's not such a bad place. The General and I share a little house and are quite comfortable, if only the infernal

[1] His uncle by marriage, now Lieutenant-General Sir J. H. M. Shea, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., Indian Army.

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church bell was not so religious—it seems to go on continuously, and I must have an interview with the curé! We are split up in billets all over the village, and I think really it's better than being all in one house."

April 8th.

"The St. Eloi defences are really now becoming very formidable, and I think Mr. German will have his work cut out to break through if he tries again."

April 9th.

"I heard from Tom to-day that Dads is ill. I must get over to see him."

April 11th.

"I went over to Armentières this evening. Dads has got a bad go of bronchitis, and will be *hors de combat* for some time. It seems extra hard luck just as the weather is getting so lovely."

April 12th.

"I went up to Q1 last night with Wavell (the 9th Brigade have come back now). It was very interesting. Walking up to Q1, one could see the black lump of the Mound looming up ahead, and when the flares went up one realised that it was safer to stand still. We got up all right, and the trench was a duplicate of Q2—very good.

"We went along the trench to the mine-house which is over the road, but one hardly realises one is going through the road, as it has been cut through and the breastwork built over it. The mine-house is but a collection of bricks with some low walls. There were a few men in it, looking out for snipers from the Mound, which was only about fifty yards off. In the dark it shows up very clear against the sky and looked bigger than it really is. It consists of a mound of material for making bricks, and is I suppose about 25 or 35 feet high. Behind it are two small stacks of bricks, into which the Germans have built a machine gun. There was a sniper at work on top of the Mound, for I could see the flash of his rifle. The mine-shaft is in the house and is about 15 feet deep; the gallery which is being carried towards the Mound is about 12 feet in now.

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"I went down and very dirty and hot I got, as one had to go down by a rope ladder, which was no joke. I squatted in the gallery and talked for a few minutes to the miners, who are specially enlisted fellows from some Durham coal-mine; a jolly looking lot they were, and working as happily as if they were in their native coal-mine instead of forty yards from the Germans!

"The 5th Fusiliers were holding the trench, with Roddam in Command; he is a good fellow. I made many inquiries about Kinkie's body, which I knew could not be many yards off. They said there were still a lot of dead about, but that they were hard to get at. Roddam promised though to try and locate Kinkie's body, and I said I would go up again if he thought he had done so.

"On the way back I went and fell plump into a 'crump' hole full of water; the half-light makes things very deceptive, and I had got too confident! I fell on my face, but didn't really get very wet. It was horrid though to turn on the torch (which I had to do to find my stick), as I then saw the sort of water it was. Ugh! I won't describe it!"

April 15th.

"Dads still bad, and as yet not on the mend. He will have to go home for a rest and change when he is fit to move. I got back just in time for a 'scare,' about 11 p.m.

"The Germans blew up a big mine just in front of the mine-house in Q1. The damage caused by the explosion was considerable, the shaky walls of the mine-house collapsed, burying several men and blocking up the mine-shaft. Also the barricade over the road fell down and a good deal of the left end of the breastwork. About 20 men were killed and injured in all. It might have been much worse. Several people showed great pluck in getting men out, especially as the Germans threw bombs into the ruins and kept up a heavy fire. At first it was feared that all the miners must have been killed, but when light came in the morning a thin column or rather wisp of smoke was seen coming out from the blocked-up shaft, and this was pronounced to be cigarette

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smoke! and so it was, and the miners, not the least upset by the affair, were fairly soon liberated."

April 17th.

"We had an alarm a few days ago. About 7 p.m. the following message marked 'Secret' arrived, and we all prepared for a great attack. This is the report we received:

"'A reliable agent of the French Army in Belgium reports that an attack on the Ypres salient has been arranged for the night of 15/16th. A prisoner of the 234th Regt. 16th Corps taken on 14th April near Langemarck reports that an attack has been prepared for noon on the 15th Reserves have been brought up and passages prepared across old existing trenches in the rear of the present German trenches to facilitate bringing forward artillery.

"'The Germans intend making use of tubes with asphyxiating gas placed in batteries of twenty tubes for every 40 metres. This prisoner had in his possession a small sack filled with a kind of gauze, which would be dipped in some solution to counteract the effects of the gas. The German *moral* is said to have much improved lately.

"'It is possible that the attack may be postponed if the wind is not favourable, so as to blow the gases over our trenches.'

"Of course, as is always the case, it was a false alarm, and the night went very peacefully. Anyhow, if the attack does come I fancy it's not likely to come on us here, and this gas business must be pretty good nonsense. I can't think they will be quite such devils as that."

April 18th.

"The Hill 60 attack was quite a success. We exploded about six mines along the top of the hill and our Infantry got up there without any losses. They were, though, there heavily counter-attacked, and at present it's a regular hornet's nest on top up there, and the German's heavy artillery not content with shelling Hill 60 out of existence, are now putting 16-in. crumps—super-super-crumps!—into Ypres. Most horrid fellows they are to

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hear. Poor Ypres, it seems so long ago that I saw it in November, an almost unharmed and lovely old place, and now it's burnt and broken and hopeless."

April 21st.

"We went up to Q1. It has been considerably altered by the explosion of the mine, but really I think on the whole is stronger. The miners were hard at work, and the 'foreman' persuaded me to go down again, which I did to please him. The rope ladder seemed more eel-like and muddy than ever. The gallery is now about 17 feet out towards the Mound. They had some trouble at first in going on with the gallery, as the soil (which is blue marl) was much broken up by the mine. However, they have now passed this bad bit. I felt a bit anxious to get up to the top again, for I couldn't help thinking of what another mine might do. It would be so vile a death to be buried alive, not that this at all worries the miners! I doubt if ever they think of it.

"I had a look for Kinkie's body, but was disappointed, as I only found that of a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Irish, who seemed in the dark to be about the right size. One can't get much nearer the Mound, for the flares are such an awful nuisance, and when one comes down close by one and burns on the ground, one feels that one *must* be seen. Yet by lying flat and *perfectly* still one never seems to be seen, even though it can't be much more than 30 yards from the Germans. However, the flares had the merit of showing one where one is, and what one is looking for.

"Also got in a body of a man in the K.O.Y.L.I.—how he got there I can't think, for his regiment has never as far as I know been there. It must have been very long ago. We buried them behind the trench. One gets very callous I find. It was a poor sort of funeral, no service, no nothing; just an old great-coat over the face and a few odd curses by some man at another's clumsiness. Also there is the risk of a stray bullet, for naturally one wishes to bury the body as far back from the trench as possible, but one don't much like leaving the shelter of the parapet, as the graves are dug just about two yards behind the trench."

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April 22nd.

"A long dull day. Hill 60 is fairly quiet again now, but it's an awful shambles up there, as all these exploding mines and the terrible quantity of crumps have brought to light many things that were better buried, especially large quantities of very old Frenchmen, and these added to our own and German dead, make things very bad.

"About 5 p.m. heavy shelling started up Bixchoote way. It turned out to be a very heavy attack by the Germans on the junction of the Canadian Division and the French. We have but little news of it as yet, except that the Germans used poison gases (as we were warned they were going to) and drove back our extreme left and the French right a longish way—exactly how far or what the situation is now none of us know as yet."

April 23rd.

"A very cold, windy day and a lot of dust about. Motoring round this morning we met a lot of refugees coming from Ypres, a sad sad sight, old old men pushing a few household treasures along in a wheelbarrow and husbands shifting wives in the same conveyances, all wearing their best clothes, poor people.

"The Canadians, as far as I can make out, did not give way, but the French troops, consisting of Turcos and Zouaves, *did*, and the Germans came streaming in through the gap they left nearly into Ypres. The Canadians fought like heroes, shoved all the men they could up on to their left flank, and were eventually supported by the 85th Brigade, who prolonged the Canadian left. The French were driven out by this gas. The filthy brutes of Germans have a lot of this gas which they carry in these tubes, and turn on when the wind is the right way for it. The effect on our fellows as far as I can find out is that they are unable to open their eyes, saliva comes from the mouth, and they are quite useless for at least an hour. It does seem too rotten a thing to do, and I never thought they would come as low as that. The Zouaves and Turcos apparently disliked the gas very much and I don't blame them."

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April 26th.

"Last night Cory got news that his brother was missing—'Bob,' who is in the 57th Highlanders (Canadian). This was about 8 p.m., so we got a car and after dinner we set off together. He was naturally very much upset. We left the car just outside Ypres, as the shelling was very heavy. Luckily it was a bright moon, so we could pick our way along fairly easily, which was lucky, as we had to cross all sorts and kinds of debris in the streets. Just as we got to the level-crossing at the north-west corner of the town, a big crump landed almighty close, throwing all sorts of stuff about us; there were two dead horses there, evidently just killed, and the Boches were making a dead set at this entrance Two shells a minute (and big 'uns too) were coming on to this place. There was a dead civilian there too, a grotesque looking muddle at the side of the road, with a huge bundle of his worldly goods wrapped in a sheet. He was the only civilian I saw in the town last night. A little past the dead horses and close to the prison was a dead soldier.

"Everything was in a horrid mess, and the town was on fire in several places; it was a rummy scene, the big battered town, the very still moonlight night, the scrunch of broken brick and glass under foot and no sign of life but for the occasional motor ambulances rushing through as quick as they could get, and then several times to the minute one would hear coming wailing along some big shell, getting closer and closer, then the crash as it hit some building and a roar as it burst.

We threaded our way between the Cathedral and the Halle, and I noticed here that that vile statue was still standing of the gentleman in frock coat and baggy trousers—the only whole thing left in Ypres! We got out into the Square and then turned down to the left along the Bruges road; here we met a string of horse transport which was making a detour round the town. It was making an *awful* noise. I know no such intense noise as G.S. waggons on a *pavé* road! One can't help feeling that the Germans must hear it so clearly; whether they did or not I don't know, but a crump and two shrapnel arrived simultaneously and made me jump 'some.'

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"We turned to right here towards St. Jean; the road was packed, columns of waggons and infantry going both ways. Luckily the road was wide, but the shelling was less along here, though each corner or cross-roads had its quota of dead horses, showing the accurate registration of the German guns. We were looking for the 15th Battalion, and by great good fortune found them in St. Jean, for of course nobody knew where anyone else was or indeed anything else. Half-way along to St. Jean I said to Colonel George: 'I suppose it is my imagination, but my eyes are smarting a good deal.' Of course I was thinking of the gas. He said nothing, but suddenly a bit farther on he said: 'Well, there is no doubt about it now,' and sure enough we were well into a belt of it—this, mind you, was a good 1½ miles from the front line. Tears ran down our cheeks, and it was an abominably chokey chemical smell, rather like ether, when it was weakest. It was not unpleasant, reminding me of oranges and lilac, but even so it was a 'wicked' scent.

We found the 15th Battalion, with some trouble, in a field close by—160 of them with one officer, the Second-in-Command—Maitland I think is his name—and a fine fellow. They were all cheery enough, for they knew they had done good work, as indeed they had.

"This Battalion was on the extreme left of our line next to the Turcos. They were extremely rude about these latter, who they said ran, making no attempt at a fight. The Canadians tried to stop 'em, but it was no good, and next morning (the 23rd) they found themselves almost surrounded, especially at that part of the line which had drawn back its left on St. Julien.

"Cory's brother was here, and from all accounts made a gallant fight, for after the rest of the Battalion had retired, he was heard to be going on fighting with his machine-gun and the remnants of his Company. So that's all they knew about him, and he may be dead or wounded and anyhow a prisoner.

"They said that the gases are *awful,* and that many men were certainly *killed* by them, but they also said that they had killed a lot of Germans who came on in long extended lines and were very determined and brave.

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Eventually Colonel G. and I came away to get back intact, but we got many a scare on the way home, as the crumps were still coming into the town; we cut across the Plaine d'Amour on the way home, and never have I seen a place so ill-named! A misery it was, dead things and shell-holes and broken trees. At the level crossing a more inquisitive crump than usual nearly made us run, but we managed to make it a fast walk!

"I was very tired and my eyes hurt, so was glad to wash myself clean of that gas and get to bed. It is a new horror to this already horrible war, and there is something depressing in this gas. However, I dare say we shall get used to it.

"All counter-attacks up to date by us and the French have failed, chiefly apparently owing to this gas. Oh, if only the wind would change, and blow from the south. Ever since the 22nd it has blown so steadily from the north and north-west—just what we don't want.

"5.30 p.m. Terrific shelling going on. Everyone agrees that it's the heaviest since Le Cateau back at the beginning of things. I wasn't there. It's certainly worse than the last Ypres battle in November."

April 28th.

"It is a most lovely day, quite hot. I went out riding at 6.30. Old 'Viscount' was in great form; it was a very good ride. All the hedges are getting so green now, and the hops are beginning to climb. Everything is very spring-like and good to see."

May 1st.[1]

"I find no signs or news of K.'s body. I think it must be somewhere nearer the Mound; the ground is so hopelessly broken up that one can really make little out in the way of distinguishing objects.

In P1 we had a long talk with the H.A.C., who were happy enough, and from there we cut up to the south corner of the Bois Confluent. It was *very* bright moonlight at the moment, and the rifle shots at that place make a very loud echo in the wood, so that the cracks of the

[1] He had again been up to St. Eloi to look for Major King's body. —[Ed.]

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German rifles sound almost as if they were fired into one's ears. Above all this noise out of the wood came the singing of a nightingale! It was really wonderful. The wood is shelled by the Germans every day, and is only 400 yards from their trenches, and bullets are constantly knocking up against the trees and yet there was Mr. Nightingale singing away to his lady-love as if there was nothing wrong with the world at all. I wonder will he nest there and bring up his family? I do hope so."

May 2nd.

"The weather has changed to-day and it's cold and looks like rain. I rode early as usual, and it was nice enough then, lovely in fact, and I just got back in time for the Padre's early service."

May 3rd.

"This morning at 10.30 I felt sure that the operation was being done and was just over. I wonder if it was really. All officers and men now have respirators of sorts; the wind keeps in the north."

May 4th.

"Have just heard that all is well with Pam. It was all done after ten yesterday.

"Went up to Voormezeele this afternoon with the General. It was a hot day and very pleasant. The whole country is now getting so pretty, one can almost see the crops growing, and it's curious how all the fields have their crops of wheat and barley and rye, etc., right up to the firing-line, in spite of the fact that they can never have been planted. I suppose it's the previous year's crop coming up again.

"Got all the things off Kinkie's body last night.[1] He was simply riddled with bullets. He must have walked into a machine gun, at least, I can't account for the number of holes any other way. The body was in the ruined houses opposite the mine-house and farther forward than I had looked before; in fact, only about thirty yards from the German trench round the Mound. Even though they were hardly firing at all, I think it's too

[1] At last he had succeeded in finding it.—[Ed.]

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difficult to try and get the body back. I have sent all he had on him, which wasn't much, to Dorothy.[1]

May 5th.

"To-day is dull and hot, with a gentle breeze from the south-east. We have just come back from an address given to the men by the Bishop of Pretoria—Bill Furse's brother. He spoke very well, and in a way that will I think appeal to the men. He is very large and has Bill's nose and gift of tongue too!"

May 9th.

"Dads came back on Thursday. These days are quiet enough for us, but it is not pleasant to sit so close to everything. One longs to be up and doing something and the general air of disquiet is a bore. Hill 60 is I hear now not held by either side—it's too impossible, the place is a pile of deal, probably some 5,000 on a hill which only resembles a heap of broken earth, the actual length of the hill top is only about 100 yards. It's truly an awful place.

"We heard this morning of the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine. It's a bad black business.

"The show in the Dardanelles apparently goes on all right, but I can't help feeling it is a mistake. One can't run two wars at once, especially when we are unprepared to run even one, and here we are engaged in about six different campaigns. I think we ought to turn all our attention on to one point first and finish it. However, it may be all right."

May 17th.

The poor 28th Division has been so smashed up that it has had to be taken out and replaced in the line by Cavalry. I had hoped the days of using Cavalry to fill dangerous gaps in our line were gone, but not a bit of it; and now the Cavalry have had an awful time too, all from the German heavy artillery which concentrates fire on this wretched salient from every sort of direction. They go on firing away day and night, and just smash the trenches to bits, yet their Infantry never got in. These latter came on in disorganised mobs, and were shot down in heaps by our fellows.

[1] His aunt, Mrs. Arthur King.

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"It really looks from this as if this German opposite us here was of no great account. He may be all right in his trenches covered by the barbed wire and machine guns, but he doesn't seem to love the attack. All the new line we took up in the Salient is still intact, but our casualties have been very heavy. I heard from —— to-day that they amount to 41,000 since April 22nd—this is just in the Salient alone.

"Down south things go ill. Dads heard from Colonel Reggie Stephens to-day, and he says: 'The 2nd Battalion [1] was the only one which got into the enemy's trenches, with very heavy losses of course. We hung on there for twenty-four hours, no one being able to help us, and were subjected the whole time to heavy shell-fire, rifle, machine-gun and bombing fire. In the end I withdrew, as our losses and the enemy's increasing numbers made it impossible to stay on. I could only collect 1 unwounded officer and 140 other ranks. We lost 640 N.C.O.'s and men and 20 officers. "Daddy" Sherston and a whole heap of the boys are gone.'

"It's awful. Poor old Chaw, he was too gallant a fellow to get through this war alive. In October near Meteren he got a bullet through the chest which should have killed him, and now having just come back cured, he gets killed. The whole show was somehow badly messed up. I hear that those who ran the show turned their attention more to the second and third lines than the first, which everyone thought was going to present no difficulties, so they only gave it a short bombardment—forty minutes I believe—and the whole attack failed. The French, a little farther south, where their offensive has been so successful, bombarded for two hours the previous evening, and then for four hours next morning!

"If our lack of bombardment was due to shortage of ammunition, then those thousands of casualties in the 8th Division were absolutely murdered, for time after time has the lesson been learnt by us and sent back to St. Omer that unless you *absolutely* smash up the enemy's trenches it is murder to send in Infantry to attack. They

[1] The 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, which had been engaged at the battle of Neuve Chapelle.—[Ed.]

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all know this, and yet once again were our men sent to a useless and certain failure. I suppose we shall never know the rights or wrongs of these cases. Somebody must be responsible. —— in Parliament a few days or weeks ago got up and stated that 'no operations of the British Expeditionary Force had ever been hindered or stopped by lack of ammunition, nor would this happen in the future.' This is not the truth.

"Sir Horace S.-D. has gone home. Sir Herbert Plumer takes over his Command—Second Army. Everyone is very sad here at Sir Horace going, for he always did us jolly well."

May 27th.

"The poor old Salient has been still further knocked in, both on the 4th and 27th Divisions' front. The Germans started using gas in the night, and then broke through us at Hooge, and still farther north at Bellewaarde Farm. So far we have failed to get back the lost ground, in spite of our counter-attacks. The whole trouble is that the 27th and 28th Divisions are worn out, the 4th is but little better, and the Cavalry who are used to fill up gaps are also badly knocked about. The whole thing is being mishandled. I wish to goodness they would fall back and be done with it. Back on the ramparts they would be really quite well off. Orders have come in that we are to go up and relieve the 28th Division, and the 6th Division (in which Dads is) is also coming up from Armentières to take the place of the 27th Division. This is most thrilling; it will mean the 5th, 3rd, 6th and 4th Divisions will be holding the Salient, and I guess we shall make a job of it all right. Of course the whole trouble is that we shall still be in this shell trap, and day after day we shall be shelled silly. However, we shall have to put up with it. I hear our casualties since April 22nd have now gone up to 70,000.

"A very nice fellow called Heywood in the Coldstream has come in Cory's place.

"The people who have been gassed say that our type of respirator is excellent if kept properly damp, and now we all go about carrying them in waterproof bags. They just consist of cotton waste sewn into a veil which goes over the mouth and eyes and ties behind the head, the

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difficulty of course is to get them on in time. Zoe has sent me heaps of wonderful kinds, so if I get gassed now it's my own silly fault.

"I have been worrying lately a good deal about going back to a Battalion, but after sounding Dads and Haldane and others I have decided to stay on here at present. Indeed, I am content enough to stay, and there is only that knowledge that all four Battalions out here are so desperately in need of officers.

"The General and I went up to see the 28th Division before they went on Tuesday. We also went into Ypres, which is now a more or less complete ruin. Even the old gentleman outside the Cathedral in top hat and frock coat is down, and his head is bust off. He is rather like Bismarck—I am glad he is done for."

vii. Back to Ypres—Railway Wood

"I never met anybody who did not love him."—Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside.

May 29th, 1915.

"We are now preparing to shift from Westoutre, and the old Prince has found some gorgeous château behind Poperinghe, which he says will do for us. Our billeting arrangements in the new area, though, are going to be terribly difficult, for our area is likely to be about 10 miles long and only a few hundred yards wide—another joy of holding a small salient.

Italy declared war two days ago; even if she doesn't do wonders it shows she realises which way the fortunes of war must go in the end. She is bound to draw off a large force of Austrians or Germans, and that means more Austrian-Germans killed in a shorter space of time, which as far as I can see is all that's going to end this war. I like Mr. Belloc's term a 'War of Attrition'—just killing and killing. It's nasty, but I am sure is the secret of the whole situation now. Food and munition material apparently won't force the Germans to peace, but lack of men *will*, and even now I can't help feeling that the Germans are a bit put to it for men, and certainly they are for officers. I still have hopes of being home this year. I always betted on it lasting from twelve

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to eighteen months, though in the winter the 'Agent' and I seriously planned to dine in state in London on May 27th, his birthday—that's to-night—and as we can't celebrate the occasion as we meant to, I am going to dine with him in Bailleul. It's curious when I think how seriously we thought it *possible* that the War should be over by now, but then of course we were still believing that we should have much of K.'s Army out by then and unlimited guns and ammunition; instead, we have as few of the latter as ever, and only one of K.'s Divisions is as yet arrived. Truly we are a wondrous nation. I wonder is this non-party government a good thing."

May 31st.

"We packed up at the huts last night and slept for the last time in Westoutre.

"The General and I did a bit of looting in the town this morning—a beer mug and a looking-glass, and I can see a lot of things that will be useful for our mess and which will only get destroyed if left. I must have a look round this afternoon. This—our new day H.Q.—is quite nice, a big sunny farm, and the General and I have a nice clean room. Really, we are better off than we were at the huts.

"On Saturday evening I rode off to look for Ronnie, who is now out here Commanding the 8th Battalion, which is in the 14th Division. General Vic. Couper told me he was somewhere down near Dranoutre, and I had an awful chase round to find him. Eventually though I found him in a farm between Neuve Eglise and Bailleul. I much admired the general appearance of the good Riflemen; they may be new, but they look splendid, and have such a fine lot of officers. Archie Todd, Second-in-Command; Joe Parker, Adjutant; "Snitch," Commanding a Company, and plenty of other good fellows. Ron gave me dinner, and afterwards I walked up as far as Neuve Eglise with the Battalion, which was going up for its first taste of the trenches under the care of the North Midland Division. I felt quite an old soldier! I had a long ride back in the dark, but it was well worth going, and it was grand to see Ronnie and Joe again.

"In Ypres, Sanders and I did a bit of looting. One

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can hardly call it looting, as everything is so fearfully smashed about and destroyed. We got some glasses for the mess, and tried two or three cellars that had escaped destruction. We found no rare vintages, though! only red wine of the usual type. It must have been a funny sight to see Sandy and I crawling through holes over bricks and broken furniture, etc., and then sitting like gnomes in the ruined cellars, sampling the poor burghers' wine bins with the aid of a corkscrew and a tallow 'dip.'"

June 9th.

"Again very hot. After lunch I rode off in my shirt-sleeves to the Locre Convent, and had a very happy hour with La Mère there; she *is* a dear old lady. We had tea in the kitchen as usual and a long talk. Hardly any of the lace was finished—it's terrible slow work—but I brought back some of it. She also gave me a rosary, but it was not for me—a cryptic remark! I was riding the pony, and the old lady was very delighted when she came to see me off that the pony shook hands with her. I rode home over the Scherpenberg, but didn't go up to see Madame or 'Towser.'

"We have been ordered to do an attack on Bellewaarde Farm, and the date of the attack is the 14th. It's now the 9th, and of course it is the most desperate business to get everything ready in four days. It is almost ludicrous, and would be if it wasn't so desperate—all the orders and reconnaissances to be done and a thousand other things.

"The 9th Brigade have now been out nearly a week, so will have had some small chance of training themselves, but the 7th Brigade, which is to co-operate, is still in, and will only come out on the night of the 12th or 13th, so they will have no rest, no chance to organise all the little details that are so essential. The artillery too are going to have a very hard task, the ammunition supply is very limited, and any programme we are likely to put forward will be probably jumped on as being impossible with the ammunition available. Altogether it's no pleasing job.

"The front of the attack will be roughly from the Roulers Railway to the Menin Road, and it means taking

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the 'E' end of Railway Wood–Y Wood, and then forcing a way up to Bellewaarde Farm and Lake. Once here, the line has got to be established. It's no small task, and the general situation of the ground and the enemy's guns makes it still harder. However, all ought to go all right, but that will be on the merits of the 9th Brigade, and not on those of the people who have ordered the attack. The excuse is that it is to be done on this date so as to take off attention from a large French offensive down south, which is always futile."

June 11th.

"Arrangements go on all right. We may now, I hear, get a day or possibly two days extra.

"We are staying at the Farm to-night, and move up to the Ramparts on Tuesday evening, the attack being now timed to take place early on Wednesday morning, the 16th. Saw Dads to-day, who is very well. His house is a fine one, and has a good garden too. He is in difficulties about getting an A.D.C. of any sort."

June 12th.

"It has been very quiet to-day. The arranging is now nearly over, and the Corps are not worrying quite so much for the moment. The General presented some medal ribbons to the 9th Brigade this morning. I always rather hate inspecting troops who are just going into a very gory battle. However, *they* don't care! so there is no reason to be so sentimental. One longs to go with them so. These next few days are going to be hard for everyone, but I much envy those who have the fighting to do."

June 13th.

"I rode over to see Dads this evening. He thinks, as I do, that everyone is treating the coming attack too pessimistically. I see no reason why it shouldn't be a success, though I think we might make it a certainty with more gun ammunition and more grenades."

June 14th.

"Everyone rather on edge over this game for the 16th. This is a pity, I think, for it don't look well. A great lesson to learn from intelligent study of some people is that if you *are* a highly strung individual you must learn not to show your feelings."

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June 15th.

"The old Germans were evidently expecting the attack to take place this morning, for last night they shelled all the roads and tracks by which we might bring up troops, and of course there was nobody there, except some working parties who were coming up to finish off the assembly trenches!

"I came up here (the Ramparts) early in the afternoon to get things ready for our occupation. It is not a very wonderful abode, but looks more or less safe from crumps."

June 17th.

"I had no time to write anything in this yesterday. We have not had a glorious victory, but it has been by no means a failure. There were no serious counter-attacks, and all the ground won was made good during the night. The result was that an important part of the Bellewaarde position was left in our hands, and that once more the individual superiority of the British soldier over the German soldier stood out most clearly. The German guns though are *splendid*.

TOTAL CASUALTIES:

Officers—25 killed, 109 wounded, 9 missing.

Other Ranks—341 killed, 1,907 wounded, 1,169 missing. *Total*, 3,560.

"The German losses must have been considerable, but not so heavy as ours; it is impossible to form any accurate estimate. We took about 200 prisoners and some hundreds of dead were buried, and it is probable that many more were killed by our men who reached the German second and third lines, and also by our Artillery, especially in Dead Man's Bottom."

June 18th.

"All yesterday the Germans went on shelling Y and Railway Woods very heavily, and caused a good many casualties in the 8th Brigade—rather hard on them, after thirty days in the trenches, to have to go back to them again and *such* trenches too, and *such* sights."

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June 19th.

"Pelham-Burn went round the line with the General and I yesterday. It was very interesting but rather horrible, as is always the case after a big or fairly big fight. We left the école about 2 p.m. and went along the railway till we came to the Gordon Farm C.T., then up this to Birr cross-roads, or rather just south of it, then up the trench towards Witt Poort Farm. It was about here that the first unpleasant signs met one—a man's foot sitting all by itself made the General jump a bit. It did look rather sad. It was about here that the Germans put most of their heavy crumps, and the place was badly chawed up. From just south of the farm we cut across to Y Wood through the assembly trenches. Half-way there we found Baird, who is Commanding the Gordons. He was sitting amongst a whole lot of beastliness, which nobody seemed to much worry about.

"Y Wood was in a bad state; our bombardment must have been beastly, and it was pleasing to think of Mr. German having to sit through it—the big 9.2-in. shells and 6-in. had knocked all the trees endways and most of the trenches, but a good deal of these were still unhurt and were very good—deep and narrow with formidable machine-gun emplacements and very strong dug-outs. Signs of their barbed wire were few, and I am sure that all the reports of its density were much exaggerated—there was a certain amount about and that was much torn up. The lyddite fumes had coloured everything bright yellow. I noticed a lot of the prisoners brought into the ramparts were bright yellow too. I think our big Howitzer shells must be quite as unpleasing as theirs.

"There were a good many dead Germans lying about, but three or four times as many of ours; that I suppose must always be the case in an attack. There was every sort of thing lying about, both ours and theirs. We went down to the south end of Y Wood and then out along the old German C.T. towards Bellewaarde Farm, which was now converted into an excellent fire trench.

"It was a good sight to be able to look *down* into the German trench that runs up towards Hooge, the first time I think during the War that I had looked down on

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a German trench, for always are they looking down into us. Not only did we look down into this particular trench, but we also absolutely had it in enfilade, and very unpleasing it can be made for Mr. German. The Wilts I think bombed up just half-way before they were outbombed.

"We went on round, till we got about due west of the farm, and here there was a sap running out to the east, at the end of which we were building a fire trench. I went down it to see how they were getting on, and looked over the parapet to see where the German trenches were. I thought I saw something move half-way between the lines, and there was some poor fellow lying wounded. He kept on waving his hand. It was awful. I longed to go out and get him in, but of course couldn't with the General there. The men though, promised to go and get him in as soon as it was dark, and that was all we could do. He must have been 50 yards from where we were. I shouted to him to tell him we knew he was there. Perhaps he heard. He must have been lying there for three nights.

"Eventually we worked our way round to Railway Wood. Here the mess was very bad indeed. Also the Germans were very close, only about 15 yards. As we got there a burial party of about sixty men arrived and got to work, so I hope that when the 14th Division take over, things won't be quite so bad, for it's a shame to put new troops into so bad a place as that. Everything was very quiet while we were up there, hardly any snipers at work in the German lines and no shelling. There is no doubt about the value of the ground gained when one gets up there. Looking back towards Ypres from the trench between Railway and Y Woods one can see every bit of ground, and how it is we ever moved about by daylight beats me. I suppose Mr. German has too wholesome a respect for our snipers to take an intelligent interest in what goes on behind the trenches actually in front of him.

"All the men were in very good spirits, and every one of them was sporting something German, either a helmet or cap or rifle or bayonet. I wonder if any of them will ever get home."

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viii. Hooge

"There is no one in the Army who will be more universally regretted and mourned than your boy. No one could know him without loving and admiring him."—General Sir Charles Fergusson.

June 20th, 1915.

"The General and I go up to Hooge this afternoon. Nothing much doing in other parts of the world. I think there may be a great event though before long—the departure of the General and I to London for a few days' leave! He *needs* it, and I think I want it—except that P. is still laid up."

June 21st.

"We had a good look round Hooge yesterday, but it was an awful day to do it on, very hot and 'muggy.' By the time we got to Blake's H.Q. in Zouave Wood we were nearly dead. However, we cooled off before 'doing' Hooge—we had a nice look at the German redoubt from Island Posts, or rather the hedge in front of the redoubt. I could see no wire in it. There is a plan afoot for this redoubt to be taken; personally, I think the way to do it is to rush it during the daytime when everyone is more or less asleep—it's only about 20 yards, and if there is no wire the machine guns would never have time to get going and we would be in. I can't see why one couldn't do this. I should like to have a go at it myself with two platoons of good Riflemen. I told the General so!

"*Later.*—It's been decided that the Wilts are to have a go at the redoubt to-morrow night, about dark. There is to be a half-hour bombardment first and also a simultaneous attack by the 14th Division on a small German work just outside Railway Wood. To my mind the half-hour bombardment by a few guns is just like giving a fellow notice you are going to kick him—but it's a Corps plan!"

June 22nd.

"Here we are at the Farm. We are dining up here to-night, owing to the impending Wilts attack—a good deal of fuss to make about a two-platoon operation.

"*Later.*—The attack failed absolutely."

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June 23rd.

"Apparently the shelling was not effective enough, and the Wilts came under heavy fire as soon as they showed themselves. The Boche was all warned and ready, so naturally it failed. I am fed up with this sort of half-hearted show; it's not fair on anyone, and must make the Germans laugh. The 14th Division 'attack' also failed. The Germans shelled the école hard this morning, as a sort of retaliation, I suppose. It's getting very smashed about now, and isn't a safe habitation at all."

June 24th.

"I am off home early to-morrow with the General. I was at Vlamertinghe this evening with Dads when a telephone message from Cameron came through, and when I got back to camp about 11 p.m. I found my warrant and Cameron's and the General's waiting! and we are off at seven."

July 1st.

"The General and I came back together to-day—a good journey. We got into camp about 4 p.m., having left London at 8.30 a.m. Everything very quiet and 'as usual.' Harrison drove us back, having had the car done up in Boulogne. I came over on the boat with Lutyens, and also saw Henry Yarde-Buller, now a Brigadier-General—he is chief liaison officer between Joffre and the War Office, and has nothing to do with our G.H.Q.

"I thought people at home seemed quite determined that we were in for a long war, and were quite ready for it; enthusiasm I saw nowhere, but there was no lack of determination, and that's the main thing necessary. All the theatres, shops, restaurants, etc., were going strong, the streets crowded with 'smart' people and everything as usual. I saw less khaki I think than when I was last at home.

"The Admiralty keep all submarine news quiet, but there is apparently no doubt that we have accounted for many more of the submarines than appears in the paper. Some say the figures were forty at the end of May, which is good hearing—if true."

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July 4th.

"It's been very hot to-day, a real summer day, so thinking that the Boches would (perhaps) be bathing, we turned a good deal of shrapnel on to all the known (from aeroplane) bathing-places—rather a dirty trick, perhaps! The results, I think, must have been satisfactory (to us), for the German guns retaliated by knocking a fresh set of holes in the unfortunate école."

July 7th.

"Went up to Zouave Wood to-day. On the way up we cut across from the Tuilerie towards Maple Copse instead of sticking to the Zillebeke C.T.; result was that we were very properly whizz-banged. It was just as we were going through a chicory field; the first burst some way ahead, perhaps 100 yards, and we did not think much of it and went on. The next was closer, but to the right front. The General was in front of me, and I saw the flash of something bright come through the tops of the chicory flowers, the next thing was a dull whack, and the General fell backwards with an awful grunt and lay gasping and groaning on the floor. It gave me a bad fright, for I didn't know what had quite happened, though as soon as I had time to realise what the flash meant I knew he couldn't be really much hurt. It was the fuse of the shell, and it had taken him right in the middle of his tummy!

"I rubbed his tummy for him, and he soon grew coherent in speech. I then hurriedly searched for and found the fuse (which burnt my fingers), and then got him a few yards forward into a ditch behind a good thick hedge. Just as well we moved, for the next two burst exactly where he had fallen, and would have made us look very silly had we been there. They went on for about twenty minutes, so we sat in our ditch and felt fairly secure, though the beastly things were bursting on grase. We got up to the wood and back again with no further misfortunes, though it came on to rain and we got beastly wet."

July 9th.

"Last night a deserter came in and gave himself up to the men in C1. He was an Alsatian, and said that the

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Alsatians were so badly bullied by their officers that were it not for fear of being shot by us they would all desert. He hadn't much useful information to give; they very seldom have, or else won't give it. This cove was only too willing to talk, but knew nothing. I often wonder if our men when taken prisoners talk freely and give away information. I expect they are very surly, and they again will know nothing worth giving away, for they hardly know their officers' names!"

July 17th.

"I have been made G.S.O.3 here instead of Sanders, who goes to Third Army H.Q.

"The 18-pounders had a naval engagement to-day, for the Infantry at Hooge spotted a barge being used by the Germans on Bellewaarde Lake, so we turned plenty of shrapnel on to them, and the barge was run on shore—a wreck we hope! I expect they used it to bring up rations, etc., in."

July 18th.

"We are going to loose off the mine to-morrow night.[1] It *ought* to be a real good explosion, as we are putting into it 3,000 lb. ammonal—over 1½ tons! The mine-shaft is in Bull Farm, and we hope the gallery end to be exactly underneath the redoubt. The idea is that when the mine goes off the Middlesex are to seize the crater and the trench in front of Island Posts and make them good. If we do this it ought enormously to improve our position in Hooge."

July 19th.

"A quiet morning. All the preparations are complete for the mine affair—it is to be touched off at 7 p.m.

"*Later.*—The mine went off most successfully, and the Middlesex took the crater without much trouble, also the bit of trench in front of Island Posts. The crater is, I hear, huge, and the explosion greater than we thought possible, so great in fact that several of the storming party were burned by the falling debris, in spite of the fact that they were all withdrawn south of the main road.

"It is very late now (about 1 a.m.). There have been

[1] This was a great mine at Hooge which had been in course of preparation for weeks. [ED.]

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about twenty prisoners sent back, miserable fellows of the 126th Regiment (Würtembergers). They were all much shaken, and small wonder."

July 20th.

"All seems all right up at Hooge. The Germans turned on a heavy artillery fire after the attack, and we had a good many casualties, but all is otherwise well, and we have got all we wanted to get."

July 21st.

"I have had a proper time of it, and am almighty glad to be back again, for Hooge is no healthy place these days. I've been sleeping all afternoon. Really I had rather a good time—I mean it was so good to be back with men again.

"I went up to the Ramparts in Ypres yesterday, to find that General Hoskins and everyone else were up at Zouave Wood, so I set off to find them. I went to the Middlesex H.Q. at the 'Tail' of Zouave Wood, and there found Fraser and Macready. Burn and Heywood and General H. were on their way back. Fraser was just going up to Hooge, so I went with him to see what there was to see before going back to the Ramparts.

"On the way up we found Major Bridgeman, Commanding the Middlesex, and had a long talk with him. There was a certain amount of shelling going on, but mostly down towards Birr cross-roads, and nothing worth speaking of into Hooge. At Birr cross-roads I noticed they were putting big fellows—8-in. and 6-in. Fraser had to go down to the wood again now to see about bombs. It was about 4.30 p.m. I suppose. I said I'd go on and look at the crater, and then come back and join him. I went down to Island Posts, and just as I got there the 6-in. German shell began to arrive a good deal too close, and a whizz-bang knocked bricks and dust all around me just as I was going round the left of the left Island Post houses.

"I went up the new trench into the old German trench, which one entered by crawling through a hole in the hedge. The trench was a fine strong one, deep and splendid dug-outs dug down about 6 feet, with at least that amount of earth and timber on top. The best of

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these had been cleaned out, and were already occupied by our men. Several of them though were occupied by dead Germans; one had an officer in it, dead. The Middlesex must have thrown a bomb into his happy home just to keep him quiet, to judge by his unpleasing appearance. There was a lot of German equipment about and a German machine gun already turned round and dug in so as to deal with its late owners.

"I went up to the end of the trench nearest the crater, and there had a most wonderful view of Bellewaards Farm and Y Wood. No wonder the Germans wanted the place, for it's a wonderful strong little position. I sat for a long time trying to make a sketch, but am a poor hand at it. To get into the crater from here was not very easy, as no trench had been completed into it. However, by keeping low one could get in at the back. It was a wonderful sight, and one I think I shall never forget. The hole was huge, at least 40 yards in diameter and 30 feet deep, but these figures give no idea of what the place looked like. The earth had been thrown up into a high 'lip' all round, and on the north and east side of this lip our men had made a good sandbag parapet and parados. The men were sitting on the great lumps of earth all round the inside of the hole, smoking and laughing, while others were keeping a look-out over the parapet and finishing off the two machine-gun emplacements.

"At the bottom of the crater was one dead German and a few tins (empty) of beef and jam! Outside the crater I had seen a few more Germans dead, all a good deal crumpled up, so I expect most of the Germans had been blown to bits and the remainder buried. I had a look out from each side of the crater, and one gets a good view of the lake and the château, in fact, it's a most commanding point, and the fact of our being there must irritate the Boche a good deal. I met a subaltern of the Rifle Brigade (8th Battalion) up there looking round (for the 14th Division is going to relieve us in Hooge in a few days' time).

"We were talking, when suddenly a very fat crump landed south of the road; there was a moment's pause, and then—I thought the end of the world had come at first, and then I thought the Germans were making a

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great bomb attack! Something caught me a whack on the back, and I looked up to see the sky full of all sorts of things. It was a bomb store (*the* bomb store) which had blown up, and the bombs kept on going off. I saw almost at once what had happened, and passed round the word what it was. Everyone when the 'bombing' started had rushed to their posts with shouts of ''Ere they come!' and we all laughed when it was realised there was no attack.

"I went off though at once via Bull Farm to see what had happened. The shelling was now becoming considerable, whizz-bangs in plenty and the 6-in. and 8-in. crumps, all south of the road though (where I had to go!). I had got along some distance when I met an agitated cove who said, 'For God's sake come along.' I asked him who he was, and why he was so worried. He was the Adjutant of the ——, and told me that all his H.Q. was blown up and the men buried or killed.

"We ran round, and sure enough the big crump had done 'some damage'; most of the men (there must have been a dozen there) had vanished. The first one I met was in two halves, and he was blocking up the trench. It was a wicked sight.

"I then found a poor fellow buried up to the neck and crying most miserably—said he couldn't breathe. I found a shovel and got going on him. The Adjutant was quite useless, half balmy. There were two other fellows buried up to the thighs, both unhurt. One of them, by leaning forward, was able to help me dig. I fairly dug and kept on trying to cheer up the poor little man who was in a good deal of pain; it's very difficult to dig out a man, I soon realised that, for one fears to stick the shovel into him, and one is working in a cramped space. Noble help now arrived in the form of a gunner signaller or rather telephonist, a good fellow, and he soon got himself a shovel.

"We had just got the man half undug and he was beginning to stop crying when another 8-in. landed almost 20 yards off. There had been plenty of all sorts about, but not so close as this. It went off very well; the gunner and myself were knocked violently on top of the buried cove, and something hit me a dreadful knock on the head.

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So I lay still a bit thinking, and heard the gunner say something about 'The poor bloke getting knocked out too,' which effectively cured me and we went on digging. It seemed to take a very long time, but at last he was out, and after a bit was able to hobble away. We then freed the other two, who also departed, and the gunner and I were left alone in our glory, for I had long since been extremely rude to the Adjutant, who had gone off.

"The damage done was bad; one bomb store was completely destroyed and the other filled up with earth and men. Luckily, however, the telephone dug-out could still be cleared. It was really an advanced Battalion H.Q., so we did this, and by great good fortune found a wire which led to the Gordons' H.Q., so I talked to Fraser and told him I would stay up till things quieted down a bit. It must have been about 5.30 or later.

"I think the shelling was getting worse about now, so I set about trying to find out what would happen if the Boche attacked. I found there were no men south of the road at all, and Dinwiddie, who was commanding the Company of the Gordons in the crater, said he had too few men. I went back to my Headquarters (!) and had a look eastwards—in the tunnel I found about thirty Gordons and two stout N.C.O.'s who I took off with me to keep as a bodyguard.

"It was now beginning to get dark, and to add to our joys the Germans started with the big Minnenwerfer. This is a BEAST—about 12 in. diameter and about 2 ft. 6 in. long, range about 700 yards. The first thing I knew about him was when I heard him coming; I looked up and saw him. He looked quite innocent: 'Wuff, wuff, wuff,' he said, then suddenly steadied himself and came straight down. A moment's pause, and then the most almighty big bang, unlike a crump—there were no bits flying about—just a crash, a cloud of black smoke and then the sky blackened with lots of things. The first seemed to drop about Bull Farm, and then they went on coming about one every five minutes. It was the nastiest thing to see, and I couldn't help wondering when or where the next was coming. I'd sooner *live* with crumps than spend a few minutes with these aerial torpedoes.

"As it got darker there was a cloud of sparks as he

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burst, and one only heard the 'wuff-wuff.' I went to the telephone and tried to get our guns on to where I thought our friend to be—he was somewhere up the Menin Road.

"I was told that all the Middlesex were to be relieved during the night by the 1st Gordons. These reliefs soon started, and the night became rather a nightmare after dark, and I don't quite remember the order of events. We only had the one trench, already almost completely wiped out, and nowhere giving more cover than up to one's shoulders. I had a very good Sergeant in the Gordons, who was a great help. One burst of 'woolly bear' did a lot of damage to us, the trench in a moment was blocked by dead and wounded, and was extremely difficult to clear. One poor fellow had had his arm blown off, and *was* so hard to pick up in the narrow trench, and then there was nowhere to put him. At last we got things cleared again, but not before my Sergeant friend had been hit—he wasn't very bad, but a bit bluggy. All night long we kept passing men along, the double traffic being the devil and the wounded worse.

"I went to see Dinwiddie several times; he was running out of bombs, and I managed to get some more up to him, also some Verey lights, and so it went on till about 1 a.m., when the shelling mercifully seemed to die down. Really, one had almost ceased bothering *very* much about it till it stopped, and then it really was lovely. Everybody became sort of hilarious.

The rest of the night I was getting wounded sent down, and the worst part of the blown-in trenches dug out again. Dinwiddie in the crater was all right, but the platoon holding the trench round Bull Farm had almost been destroyed by the big torpedoes. I went round as soon as it got light and it was a horrid sight.

"After I had been round who should turn up but Cameron![1] with a grin on his face and, better still, the elements of breakfast. We had a good breakfast. I was very hungry. Daylight did not improve the look of things a bit. Before I left I set parties on covering things up and digging out the buried bombs, many of which had not gone off.

"I saw Colonel Brown in Maple Copse, and told him

[1] His servant. [Ed.]

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how things were, and then went back to Ypres, the telephonist following—rather like a dog was that telephonist, he followed me about all night, and was such a rummy looking object with a pair of German top-boots on and a German rifle and belt, which he had taken from the crater. He never left them out of his sight! I found his Battery for him by the Moat, and left him there. His name was Gunner Nagle, 49th Battery. A stout-hearted fellow."

ix. The Last of the Diaries

"He always seemed to me a Sir Galahad. He stood out so much above all his fellows."—General Sir John Shea.

July 29, 1915.

"Early this morning the Germans attacked the —— Division in Hooge, and have apparently captured the whole place. It's *sickening*." [1]

July 30*th*.

"Everything is in a fair old muddle at Hooge. They have been doing these useless counter-attacks, and have not only done no good at all, but their losses have apparently been very heavy. We are right back along the edge of Zouave Wood—it is *devilish*, really it is, all our work and trouble wasted. The whole Division is very cross.

"This afternoon I went round some of the 7th Brigade line, and an old man in the Irish Rifles asked me what all the noise had been about, so I told him, and he said: 'It's a sure thing that we shall be sent back there to clear up the mess, don't you think so, sir?' I am pretty sure he *is* right! I saw Dads to-night—he thinks he will have to go to Hooge. I bet *one* of us does, and hope it's him!"

August 1*st*.

"6th Division to be used to retake Hooge, so Dads has got a jolly little job on his hands. If anyone in the world can do it, I know it is he and the 6th Division."

[1] The 3rd Division was relieved by the —— Division at Hooge the night of July 22nd, and was moved south to take over the line from St. Eloi northwards. [Ed.]

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August 6th.

"Went over to see Dads this evening. Great preparations are going on for the retaking of Hooge. I am sure they will get in all right; the question is how they are going to stand the subsequent shelling. Our artillery are giving the Boche something to think about up there, and I am sure he must be having a very bad time. His artillery are giving Zouave Wood a bad time too, but we have now very few men in it. The Boche has got the whole of Hooge, his front line running through Island Posts to March Houses. Dads says Geoff. is likely to turn up very shortly, which will be a great event.

"The 6th Division attack went in at 3.15 a.m. As far as we can hear it's been a great success."

August 10th.

"Went in early to the Ramparts and saw Dads, who told me all the news. They hold a line (I think) from the crater to somewhere near Bull Farm and then down to the Marsh House, then back to Zouave Wood. This is a strong line which denies Hooge to the Boche, but I think they will have to shove forward a bit when things get quieter. At present we do not hold the stables, and I think those ought not to be given up.

"They killed a lot of Boches during the attack; the Durhams were especially fierce owing to Hartlepool (the Zepp was it, or the cruiser shelling?). About fifty Boche were found hiding in the crater, and they were all dealt with most unmercifully. Dads told me a nice (?) story. He was going round seeing some of the D.L.I.—one old man he asked, 'How are you now?' 'I be all right, thank'ee, sir; slept foine last night, better than I did night before.' 'Why, how was that?' 'Well, you see, I come up to a trench, and in I tumbles roight on top o' two other blokes; one on 'em was dead, t'other aloive—the aloive one 'ad a great long whoite beard as long as my grandfeyther's!' 'Well, what did you do then?' 'Do!' (unutterable scorn), 'whoi *do*; put 'un on the point, o' course.' Poor old white-bearded Boche!

"It was entirely the very heavy shelling that made it impossible to hold on to all the position, and it was also this that caused the casualties.

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"It is a hot muggy day. Geoff.[1] should arrive to-morrow night."

August 11th.

"Geoff. turned up early this morning, arrived from Boulogne with Charlie Rich, who he met in some strange way. He fetched up here about one in the morning, couldn't find me (I was sleeping in the office), so went to bed in the Belgian interpreter's tent! As I was sitting in the office after breakfast he turned up, much grown. It's great having him here. We went up the Scherpenberg this morning, and had a good look round. It was a lovely morning, and all very quiet. After lunch we went up to see General Hoskins, who is going to take him round the 8th Brigade trenches to-morrow. After we had been there some time we walked back through Ypres, which is always an impressive sight, and finally fetched up at Vlamertinghe, where we found Dads. I left Geoff. there."

August 12th.

"Called for Geoff. about twelve. He had properly changed his appearance—Dad's breeches and puttees, which fitted very well, a private soldier's jacket which he filled only moderately, and a trench cap (with a General's badge), belonging also to Dads. We set off and went to the Lille Gate; they were putting a few crumps thereabouts. Geoff.'s first baptism! We had lunch with General Hoskins, and then Geoff. and he went off together. I had to get back to the office. He eventually arrived back at Reninghelst, having had great adventures, at 11 p.m. He had a shot with a rifle, very nearly met a Minnenwerfer, saw some shelling and in fact had a great day of it."

August 15th.

"Dined with Dads to-night. Geoff. has spent the day up in Hooge! He went up with 'Uncle' Harper, and saw all the gruesome sights there were to be seen and had a very happy time. He came back with various Boche loot, and intends taking the articles back to his battleship. I wish he hadn't got to go back, for he is

[1] His midshipman brother. [Ed.]

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excellent company. He is off to-morrow, going down, I think, with General Nicholson."

August 21st.

"Here we are, holding Hooge again. The relief came off all right! I *knew* it would, but it really is the very devil having to go back there again. We hoped against hope that we were on the Canal line for the winter, and worked hard at getting everything put to rights. Now all our work goes into others' hands, and we come to this beastly place, where everything has got to be done over again.

"Hooge is in a poor way. Its condition after the 6th Division attack was too awful, and ever since then the 17th Brigade have been working hard to get it straight, but it's a hard job. The dead bodies, old and new, made everything so fearfully slow, for one cannot dig a yard without coming on some grim relic which has either to be reburied or dug round. They have done good work, though, and 'Uncle' Harper tells me that they have buried over 1,000 bodies. I went up there yesterday and found the 3rd Battalion in Sanctuary Wood. I met Prideaux Brune commanding a Company, and also saw Kewley, who is now Adjutant and Bob Piggot commanding. I found all my old friends in the signallers, and it was good seeing them again. They all seemed very cheerful.

"I heard to-day the ill news that we are likely to have to do a further attack on this front—of all places to choose on the British front I suppose this is the worst. I only hope the General puts his heels in and refuses point-blank to do any such mad thing as attack here."

August 24th.

"There is no doubt that we are to do this attack. I believe our show is merely to co-operate with something big down south, which will mean the old game of not getting enough gun ammunition. However, apparently modern tactics call for these feint attacks, though I can't see that they do any good.

We are to start bombarding the Boche trenches almost at once, daily bombardments. There is a doubt as to

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whether we are to have any 9.2-in. ammunition. If we don't have this it's a poor show."

August 25th.

"The Boches shelled Hooge to-day in retaliation, but not very seriously. We are all very hard at work now preparing things, but we cannot get any definite news as to the date, which is troublesome. John [1] arrives from Paris with Sopwith."

September 2nd.

"A very busy few days these have been. Guffin has been ordered to G.H.Q., and in spite of protests from the General, which have gone on for some days, he has at last had to go. It's the very devil coming at such a time as this. He went to-day, and one Glasfurd—Indian Army—is to come in his place."

September 4th.

"This rain has flooded most of the communication trenches, and it is hard work getting up to Hooge now by day. I have started a system I think may help to keep the C.T.'s in order, and that is each trench to have trench wardens, about ten men and a N.C.O. who live in the trench, and are responsible for keeping everything in order. Of course, many of the trenches are at present too hopeless to be dealt with by ten men and need more like 1,000."

September 8th.

"The attack has been put off, date still vague. I was up at Hooge all last night and got back about 7 a.m. this morning. Took Cameron with me. We got into Sanctuary Wood all right (without even being challenged), and I went up to the Worcesters' H.Q., who gave me dinner in their dug-out. Hankey, who Commands them, is a good fellow. They know very little about Hooge. I generally find that the people holding the trenches have this failing. After dinner I slept in Colonel H.'s dug-out till about 2 a.m., when the moon came up and made things fairly visible.

"Evans arrived from Brigade H.Q., and I set off up

[1] His youngest brother, then aged twelve, who had come out to see his father.—[Ed.]

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to Hooge to go round the old C3, C2, and C1. We were likely to meet a Boche patrol, so went pretty slowly. I knew the ground best, so went first—it's rather thrilling. We found the trenches in an awful bad state, all blown to bits, and a great many dead in the ruins of them. These poor fellows were in a bad way, and the rats made me feel horrid, like wanting to be sick. However, they reduce the bodies to skeletons fairly quickly—such rats they are, big as rabbits, and so bloated that they hardly take the trouble to run—beasts. It was rather jumpy work; we stalked a tree stump for several minutes at one time, I with a somewhat wobbling revolver trained in the direction of its tummy! Then we ran into one of our own patrols who were coming up from the south—they ran away!

"Eventually we got back to the Worcesters H.Q. about 6.15, and I woke up Mr. Cameron and returned home. Went over to see John at Vlamertinghe; he is having a great time, and already knows as much about everything as most officers do out here. He is not communicative, but notwithstanding this a very good companion. They all of course love him over there."

September 9th.

"I went up to Hooge again last night and again took Cameron. It was a good evening, and I made a good tour. Everything in north-east. Hooge is still in a pretty bad way, and I don't know how the 2nd S. Lancs are ever going to assemble behind the stables. I found some fine cellars in the one but last ruin of the north line of houses. One has to drop in through a hole, but once inside it's fine—two rooms, tables, chairs, and a full-length looking-glass, a truly astonishing thing to find in Hooge. There was a *Daily Mirror* of May 30th which had not been read, so the cellar was I think last used by the Cavalry before we relieved them. These cellars must be pretty nearly crump-proof, for there is about 10 feet of brick and timber and debris on top. Cameron saw a black cat (I saw it too), and said we were going to have bad luck. I thought they were lucky! It's a wonder how that cat has stayed on in Hooge; it must live in some hole in the ruins, and I suppose gets plenty of

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victuals by eating rats. The wonder is that the bombardments have not killed it. It must have more than its proper complement of lives, I think. Cameron had brought some food and cold tea, which gave us dinner, which we shared on the edge of the Menin road.

"It was very quiet up there; the Boche was working hard repairing and strengthening his works, and our people were not doing nearly enough to hinder this work. I got them going with rifle grenades and catapults, but unless one *forces* them to do things they are quite content to sit down and do nothing. They are like children, the modern officer and N.C.O., one has to start them on a game and then they love it and go on playing it till they get bored, when one has to invent something else to amuse them!"

September 10th.

"To-night Dads and John called for me here, and we went to the 'Fancies' in Poperinghe. It was a very good show. One man sang awful well—in the Queen's Westminsters he was. After it was over I had to say good-bye to John, for he returns to Paris via Boulogne to-morrow. The poor man is a bit sad, and it was horrid having to say good-bye to him."

September 11th.

"A lovely fine day. I went up to the 7th Brigade about 7 p.m., and Evans and I spent the evening in Hooge. I got home about midnight. It was very quiet up there. We can't stop the Boche working at present, as we have so much work to do ourselves in exposed places. An Irish regiment last night was working on the old C1, C2, C3 line, and after working a short time the whole 400 bolted! The whole affair I think started owing to the Irishman's fear of ghosts; the line as I've said, is very full of dead in all sorts of conditions, and that and the rats were too much for their nerves. However it was, they came back, and had to be driven out again by their enraged officers. Of course it's very bad, but almost laughable. Evans and I met two to-night who were on patrol and they were shivering with fright. They nearly shot us, and then could give no coherent account of what they were doing. We were very angry, yet I

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couldn't help laughing when we eventually got them put back where they should have been. They are just like children, frightened of the dark and the 'spooks'! I found a German machine-gun box which I brought back. The work up there is going ahead now with the fine weather, and I think everything will be ready in time."

September 12th.

"Still very fine. General Hoskins and Fraser came to lunch, and afterwards they, the General and I went up to Mont de Cats, which is a wonderful place for a view, even prettier than that from the old 'sherp.' There is a Trappist monastery on top of the mountain, and we went over the building, which is all fairly modern. Looking to the south one can see Lille and to the north (on a fine day) Calais and Dunkirk. After that we went on to Bailleul to see General Bill Furse, and then home, quite a 'joy ride'!"

November 27th.

"To-day the 'G' office was completely destroyed by a fire. I had just gone out of it, when the silly ass of an orderly tried to light the fire with a tin of petrol. I heard the explosion, and in a moment the whole place was in flames, for it was only made of wood and canvas. The man was badly burnt, and it was lucky nobody else was. Everything we had was burnt—all the papers, typewriter, maps, in fact, all that was left was a bundle of unimportant papers that happened to be in the mess hut.

"My diary was burnt, and a good many other papers and books of mine. The only good thing was that it was a freezing cold day, and I got proper warm trying to put the fire out. Also wet, as one man threw most of a bucket of dirty water over me in his excitement. We finally withdrew to a room in the village and began to collect papers again. Poor ——'s dismay when he returned was ludicrous, for all his precious 'grenade file' was gone, and he is a tiger for works of art on paper. I don't feel much inclined now to go on with a diary—so much that was interesting was burnt, all the September 25th fighting up at Hooge, and can't bother to write it all out again."

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December 1st.

"I hear there is a good chance of my going to the 76th Brigade as Brigade-Major, which is good news. It's all quiet nowadays up in the trenches, especially in the right sector, where most of our trenches have most terribly fallen into decay."

December 8th.

"Have to-day been appointed Brigade-Major to the 76th Brigade. I shall I think move up with Cameron to Woodcote House to-morrow. Cameron does not appreciate the prospect of the change, and thinks it would be better if I went to a Corps Staff! He says we would do well to keep away from trenches."

December 9th.

"To-day the Navy arrived to be shown trench life—a petty officer, four seamen and a marine turned up, and were hearty looking fellows. Admiral Jellicoe had sent a message saying that he was anxious that the men should see as much trench life as possible, as he had pointed out to them that 'although their life afloat is monotonous, they live in much greater comfort than their brothers ashore.' This meant that we had to arrange sundry straafs for their benefit, and as luck would have it their arrival in the trenches was greeted by the Boche trench mortars. This of course got our mortars and artillery straafing, so that they had a lively time, and I must say appeared to thoroughly enjoy it!"

December 23rd.

"We had a Zepp over last night, at least everyone says there was one. I doubt it myself. I am making out a gorgeous Boche straaf for Xmas Day—just to show him how much we really can 'hate.' It is rather miserable weather."

December 24th.

"Awful rot; a wire came in this morning saying, 'No action is to be taken by us on Xmas Day which is likely to provoke retaliation on the part of the Germans.' Was *ever* such an order given before? I am especially annoyed, as I had taken some trouble in organising our

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'hate.' However, it will do for New Year's Day! Cameron is making everything lovely for to-morrow. He has looted a fearsome sort of wreath of roses (paper) from Ypres, which is festooned on the ceiling of the dining-room, and he has got holly *and* mistletoe from somewhere, which is splendid. My bed has a large piece of the latter above it and a beautiful 'Wishing you a Happy Christmas' in my best drawing inks (I think); at least, I know no other source of such various colours.

"Some parcels have come for me, but these also has he taken from me! Even Pam's letter, marked 'for Xmas Day,' has been stolen from my table."

Xmas Day.

"It's been a happy day. This morning when I woke up I saw hanging above me a large sack. For some time I was too sleepy to realise what it was, but eventually remembered. It was my Xmas stocking, and I had a fine old time with it. Almost all its contents were from Pam, parcels of sweets and books, and a silver bank-note holder. I had a happy time. Cigarettes there were too.

"It's been a windy wet day, and I have been very lazy. This afternoon I got into a chair and ate *marron-glacés* and smoked cigarettes and read a book. Some day! And to-night we had a great banquet—a goose and fiery plum pudding. The Boche has been quiet, his only 'offensive action' being that he started singing some rotten German stuff which the King's Own wanted to get our guns to reply to, but I had to say we had been ordered to be peaceful, though I think Boche hymns do almost call for artillery retaliation."

December 30th.

"Some excitement to-day. About 7 a.m. this morning all the water in the big Bluff crater suddenly disappeared with a rush, and left exposed in the south-west corner of it the entrance to a Boche gallery. Brisco at once went up and started off down the gallery by himself, leaving a man armed with a rifle at the entrance. After going about 60 feet he heard somebody coming towards him, so slowly retired; when he had got close back to the

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entrance again he waited, and as soon as the Boche shoved his head round the corner fired with his revolver. He missed, and the man who was with him in his excitement let off his rifle, which flew up and hit Brisco a whack on the nose that nearly knocked him out, so the Boches got away. I got up in the afternoon to see how things were, and found the crater almost dry; many tons of water must have run off down the Boche gallery, and Brisco had blocked up the entrance to the gallery with sandbags and was awaiting developments. I also found three grenadiers of the R.W.F. sitting on top of the block! These I hurriedly withdrew to a safe distance. About half an hour later the Boche blew up his gallery from the inside without doing us any damage, so now all is quiet again. It has shown us, however, that he is still working in the neighbourhood, and we shall have to be on the look-out.

"It must have been the gradually increasing weight of water in the crater that eventually broke down the block that the Boche had built in his gallery. Our only hope is that some Boches were drowned! . . ." [1]

[1] The diaries end here, for the reason already given.—[Ed.]

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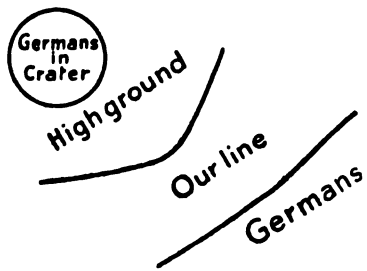
CHAPTER III

EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTERS OF BILLY CONGREVE

i. The War

ON the very still night air comes the crashing of guns, fitfully, like cross old dragons bothered by some everlasting pain."

"I must tell you my chief adventure of this last fighting. We attacked in a thick fog at 2 a.m. on Monday morning, so thick that everyone lost their way and our attack was almost a failure. It was about 5 a.m. I realised that nobody knew exactly what had happened, so off I went again up to find out. I wonder now I could do it, for I was really physically almost beat, but something seemed to make me quite untired all of a sudden. When I got up I found everything in an awful mess—men all over the place and few officers, none of whom knew what to do. The chief difficulty was that a party of Germans (nobody knew how many) had been cut off by us and were occupying a mine crater on the inside of our position like this:



"Our attack had *missed* the crater, you see, in the fog. Being on high ground the Boches in it were able to shoot

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our men down below and this stopped their moving about and getting the captured, and almost entirely destroyed trenches put into a state of defence. As I say, we did not know how many Boches there were, but they had to be got out. Just as I was wondering I saw a sandbag hoisted on the top of a stick and waved about like a white flag, but firing still went on, so I guessed that some of the Boches there wanted to surrender and others not. So I determined on a bit of bluff.

"The crater was 50 yards from where I was, so I got out my revolver, and told four men and an officer to come with me and got out of the trench. The first moments were very anxious! and I expected each moment we might get straafed, but only one shot was fired, and that when I was half-way up to the crater and it missed. The Boches evidently thought that if we sent four men to capture them we must feel fairly confident of the ultimate result, which was what I intended. Imagine my surprise and horror when I looked into the crater and saw a whole crowd of armed Boches! I stood there for a moment feeling a bit sort of shy and then levelled my revolver at the nearest Boche and shouted 'Hands up, all the lot of you!' A few went up at once and then a few more and then the lot, and I felt the proudest fellow in the world as I cursed them. I did curse them too, called them 'dirty German pig dogs' and worse things, and they said 'Don't shoot, don't shoot!' and I swore all the worse. Then we collected the officers' revolvers, and I made them march in front of me and the others marched along in rear, and we led them all off down to our support trenches, where I left them with the officer and the four men and went back to see how the other things were getting on. There were 68 men and 4 officers in that crater—Prussians too! My word, I did enjoy it. When I first looked into the crater I could have sworn that there were at least a hundred!" [1]

"They shelled a village close to here the other day, and the inhabitants collected their worldly goods and fled till it was over. One lady passed the huts wheeling a

[1] It was for this that Billy was awarded the D.S.O.—[Ed.]

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[*G. C. Beresford*

CAPTAIN AND BREVET-MAJOR W. L. T. CONGREVE, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.,
LÉGION D'HONNEUR

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pram which was full of babies and *huge* bundles, and leading a child—a sort of young caravan. The men chaffed her in English as she went past, asking her what was up. She turned round with a grin and said 'Damn Coal-box'—the only English she knew!"

"Of all jobs I've met this 'Brigade-Major' is most dear to my heart. I love it. I am more or less my own master, quite really! There is unending work to do, there is heaps that's *definite* to show for it—and it's good."

"I think the women out here are the most wonderful people. Yesterday the shells were bursting about 400 yards off—quite safe we were—walking—but odd bits go a long way, and coming towards us were three girls and a man. A fat crump blew up and a big bit came singing towards us. The man ducked violently, but the women laughed as if it was all a huge joke, and went to pick up the bit that had buried itself in the ground close to them. The man looked rather silly. They were very strangely unafraid these women, and it's not from lack of knowledge of what shell wounds are like. I've often seen them standing outside their cottages and watching the shells bursting quite close, and even bringing out the babies to watch too."

"The whole trouble is that as a nation we are *not* soldiers. We have many good and gallant individuals, no nation more so, but we are not *professionals,* and the Germans are; they have forced themselves to be by years of training. We shall never become as good as they are, I am sure of that, but we shall beat them just because we are British and will go on till the Germans *can't.* Luckily the French are more professional, but we!—we are laughably inefficient and casual in so many ways: no wonder the Germans hate us because we are 'frivolous'—everything shows it so. The German shells a wood full of our men, gives it an awful doing and probably kills and maims a lot, yet a few hours afterwards it will be full of men again all advertising their presence by lighting fires and singing and playing mouth-organs.

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Whereas if we shell a German wood, you may be quite sure that for a very long time there will be no signs of life there. I will tell you another instance. A few days ago I was up in Hooge. I came to a certain place, where I found two men and a dead Sergeant—it was a sort of listening post, a dead end trench. The Sergeant had been with the Battalion since the War started, so knew what things mean. He had been shot through the head. I said, 'How did this happen?' 'Oh, there's a good sniper, sir, about thirty yards off.' 'Well, why did he go showing his head?' 'Why, he'd just 'ad two of them little periscopes busted by the sniper, and wanted to 'ave a look for 'im.' Can you *imagine* it, an old veteran who had just seen two bits of glass about the size of half a crown smashed by two consecutive bullets goes and puts his *head* up to have a look?—casual, that's what it is. . . ."

"It's very strange, and fascinates me, really it does, and I can't explain why. There is the mud and the muttered cursing, and the dim dark line showing the Boche trench a hundred yards off. All is quiet. The clank of metal, however soft, sounds like a motor-horn for terrible noise, and draws a 'Damn you, work quietly.' Then up goes a flare from the Boche trench, everyone bends double so as to hide their white faces, and the whole scene is lit up with a terrible brilliance. One holds one's breath. Surely they must see one! The flare hovers overhead and finally drops amongst the party; it splutters for a moment in the mud and then dies and the darkness is doubly dark. Everyone moves, feeling that each may have a Boche rifle laid on him! but nothing happens. The shadows are deceptive, the Boche sentry is sleepy, and the muffled work goes on again. And so it went on till suddenly one evil flare gave us away and the rifles started; even then the darkness somehow keeps fear away, and one can go on as long as the shots go wide or high —once they start shooting straight one must stop, and indeed unless vital one should stop at once or a machine gun may start and play hell in a moment. Bad luck, wasn't it, though; ordinarily it wouldn't have mattered, but I wanted these new ones broken in gently.

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"Above reads like a 'penny-a-liner,' but I got quite interested and could write lots about one's feelings on various occasions. Life is so quaint: one sees a man in one corner of the trench with a hole in his head, fresh done, and round the next corner a happy-go-lucky cove cooking a wicked-looking mixture and whistling some stale music-hall song as he does it, not a bit callous really, but his food's his food and the other fellow's dead—so why worry?"

"The old city ramparts are *very* thick and high, and in them are great vaulted brick casemates about 30 yards long and 10 wide. In one of these we have established ourselves, and one might well have a worse home. Cameron and other servants have made its grim brick walls and stone floor quite home-like with furniture and carpets from ruined houses, and we have our mattresses ranged along the walls. When one looks from the great doors into the town one can see nothing but ruins and filth, and round these ramparts we have many men living like moles in their caves all furnished in the same lavish way.

"... I lay down in my clothes and slept a good deal, though fitfully, for there was a good deal of rifle fire during the night. At 1.30 I went out to see what the day was to be like; fine it is, for there is that thin mist on the ground which means heat.

"... At 2.50 I was on the ramparts to see the bombardment start. It's now in full swing (3.45). At 4.5 it stops and the Infantry assault and my work begins. The noise is terrific and incessant, the big Howitzer shells of our guns are screaming over our heads from their positions behind the town, and every gun we have is joining in the din. In this hole in the ground the noise is like the incessant beating of some giant hammer on a muffled gong of brass; now the Germans are replying—one can just distinguish the crashing break of their big shells amongst all the other noise. Everyone is standing about looking anxious and ill-at-ease; the lamps are still alight, and outside it is quite daylight with that rather ghastly light of early morning. Oh ... I would give much this moment to be crouching low in the trench

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with my Company with my eyes on my watch as *theirs* must be. This waiting is long for me, how long indeed for them, and the Germans are shelling them now as they crouch there waiting. It's five minutes to four—another twenty minutes of this noise *et alors*? I think we shall do it. We have to take a spur of ground which juts out into our line and on which the Germans have established themselves. There is a farm on top of the hill—Bellewarde Farm. I wonder shall we be into it to-night? . . .

"The General has come to lie down again—it's four now—fifteen minutes more—there is a lull, for the moment everything is still. I can hear a bird singing outside; poor bird, he must think this a strange wicked world. Now it's off again. Bang . . . Bang . . . Bang . . . a rising and a falling squealing shriek as the shells go off to the Germans. Those guns were some way off on the left, that's why I heard 'em so clearly. A message just in to say that the bombardment is being effective. I can hear rifle fire now—for the moment it is still again—a few minutes more and the final and greatest bit of the bombardment will start. It's off—only ten minutes more—I could cry at being only a Staff Officer—just think of the glory of a charge—and yet someone must do my part.

"4.36 *a.m.* They are through the German centre all right, but the hardest part is yet to come.

"8.30 *a.m.* All going well. We have taken three lines of trenches, and now comes the business of getting things straightened out, where our work begins—Staff, I mean. About 120 prisoners have been brought in here—a sorry-looking crew."

"It was drizzling while we were up there, such a weird scene—the greasy *pavé* road, the utterly smashed-up houses, the telephone wires lying about everywhere, and dim shapes moving about, stumbling, cursing and laughing as they carry up all the necessary stores to the trenches. And all the time the incessant rifle fire and the almost incessant flares which are used chiefly by the Germans—beastly things, sort of lights which go straight into the air and come down slowly, making everything as light

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as day for a few seconds. The H.Q.'s we went up to are in a cellar, so low that one cannot stand upright, a carpet of straw on the floor and maps and messages on it; in the other part of the cellar the constant buzzing of the telegraph instruments and the 'Hello, are you there?' of the telephone operators. It's a weary life that; by day one cannot go out of the house and not with safety out of the cellar, and even by night bullets come smacking up against the walls and an occasional shell comes shrieking into the village to burst with a blinding light and a horrid crash."

ii. On Courage

". . . I *promise* you I do only that which gives faith and help to other people.

"Yes, I am wrong to grouse at not being with the Battalion. I am very very lucky really, but you understand those moments when inactivity becomes rather dreadful . . . there is rather a fascination though in danger—I don't a BIT mean to sound brave, for I am not —I feel fear sometimes intensely—but there is a strange thrill when one is once at it, that I think one gets at no other time—fear goes like magic, and one feels the old primitive man rather! It's the waiting that makes one fear, I suppose, just as when one is going to ride a race one feels a sort of 'funk'—at least I do."

". . . It must be awful to have *that* sort of ambition. I mean, to be sad because you don't get a decoration of some sort that you feel you ought to have!

". . . I think the only people I envy out here (or at home) are those who get decorations for gallantry—that must give one a most happy feeling."

"I always stay in this room, because I feel that it will keep the room from being hit, and it would be *such* a bore if they smashed up this room.

"Somehow I always have a deep sort of conviction that I am a lucky person and shall go on being lucky, and that helps."

"I feel I could do more good if I was commanding

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a Company or a Battalion, at least I'd guarantee to get *one* half of the line put right!" [1]

"Perhaps my chance will come. I should like to do something that would be really for good; it's fairly easy to acquire merit, there are so many ways open, but to do something big that will do good for the country or the people—that's a wonderful thing."

"Do you know that I always feel safe; I often feel frightened, of course, but though I've actually been hit and twice knocked over, I've always felt quite sure of not being laid out. It's rather a curious sort of 'knowledge,' but as I say doesn't stop fear. I believe very, very few men 'don't know what fear is'—*many* don't show it, and I hope I'm one of those—others do show it, and it's not a pleasant sight, I can tell you, to see a man frightened, especially a man in a responsible position."

"The General lets me now do much as I like, which surprises me, and I have a grip upon everything that gives me that feeling of confidence that I never have if two cooks are trying to do the cooking."

"Gee! I have been busy these last days. I think a great maxim for Staff Officers is 'Help everybody whenever you can and as often as you can,' and that means one must always be doing something. So many people sit down when things seem idle and sort of say 'My word, I wish I had something to do,' and I believe there is always something to do, don't you think so? I mean, whatever one is doing, amusing oneself or working."

iii. Cameron [2]

(*About his tunic.*) "It's gone at one elbow. Cameron has made a sort of wart there, and says it's darned!"

"I wonder have you ever seen chicory growing and going into flower? It's the loveliest colour in the world

[1] He had become somewhat depressed by the long stay (a year) of his Division in the Salient.—[Ed.]

[2] His servant.—[Ed.]

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. . . the plant grows to about 4 feet high and is very green in the leaf. Imagine a whole field of this growing very close and thick, and the flowers the bluest of blues, and a mass of them; it is not a violent blue like a cornflower but pale—I wish you could see it. . . . I don't think Cameron really liked it, though it was lovely! He is a rum bird. We took photos of each other—for you—and he is so silly at it, he couldn't see into the little glass, you know; he made me quite balmy waving the camera round and round like a watering-pot. I should think probably only my feet or tummy will come out."

"There are some earwigs in this hut, and Cameron says they are very dangerous! that they always make straight for one's ear and then go into one's brain and one dies—he says he knows of several cases. I told him he is a fool and a liar, but he waxed indignant, and is as obstinate as a mule. . . . Silly old ass, he makes me mad with his pig-headed obstinacy sometimes. I say one thing and he contradicts me *flat*! and I say '—— you, Cameron, you don't know what you are talking about,' and he says, 'Ah well, I know I'm right!' He very seldom is—the Scotch are a wicked race, aren't they?—they and their earwigs!

"While I was having my bath in the evening my servant, in his curious broad Scotch, said, 'Wimmen be turrible kittle creatures, sin' a wee one will twist a big strong man around her finger.' What provoked this wisdom I forget (I think he has been flirting with the young lady in my billet, though a respectable married gentleman of near forty). I said I quite agreed, but I expected he was only referring to Scotchwomen, who I felt sure were but a poor type. He got quite angry, and said he could wish me no better thing than to marry a Scotch girl. 'She would suit ye fine with your extravagant careless ways.' This was a counter-attack, so I told him I was already married, but he didn't believe me and said, 'I ken fine ye're not.'"

"He is at present engaged in making my hut into a most wonderful boudoir. On the walls are *dreadful*

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prints of Joffre and French! and photos of John and the Padre are also fixed to the walls. The window has a tiny curtain of white stuff, and he has painted the window-pane green (doing this he made awful messes and smells!); he has looted a carpet and a chest of drawers and goodness knows what else. I should think it's quite likely that both he and I are arrested for looting if the Provost-Marshal comes and looks into the hut. However, Cameron would probably rise to the occasion and produce receipts!"

iv. His Family

"To-day I got a little note from Dads beginning, 'Very dear Bildie' asking me to go to tea. He[1] generally starts 'Dear old Bill' or something like that, so I think he is perhaps feeling lonely, bless him. . . . I think you will love him, he is so straight and simple, and we will make him so happy.

"Dads mentioned in a sort of shy way (he took me by the arm as we were walking along, and he is *fearfully* undemonstrative!) that he had got your white heather, and that as it arrived on the day of the battle he felt it must truly have brought him luck."

"I know myself I am often beastly to Cis,[2] perhaps just sulky for five minutes, each minute it is harder to go and kiss her and all be happy again! and each minute one knows one is going farther and farther backwards, for I love her *so* much that I would say now I'd give my life to not cause her even a minute's sorrow, yet I often *do* hurt her in some silly little way. . . ."

"The other day he (Geoffrey[3]) went out in a mine-sweeper and was sick for twenty-four hours, poor darling, and immediately on getting back he is reported to have eaten a tin of sausages and three eggs! He said, 'MA. I was M.T!' Anyone who can do a thing like that should become an admiral very quick!"

[1] His father. [2] His mother. [3] His brother.—[Ed.]

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"We will gets Dads a Dibber of the most expensive type; he'd probably say he found his pocket-knife or fingers good enough—it's just the sort of thing he would say, bless him!"

"I went over to say good-bye to Dads, and found him and all his Staff most lugubrious about his going. He hates leaving them,[1] and they all love him so, that I was filled with pride and then almost reduced to tears, when hundreds and hundreds of men rushed out all along the road and cheered him—*real* cheering, and it made me feel quite miserable and I think he nearly wept—if Lieutenant-Generals can weep!"

"Dad's dressing-room is awful in its Spartan look; makes me cold to even go in. He is very curious like that, very wonderful, I think. I mean, he always folds up his clothes, whereas I chuck them into a chair, and have a happy feeling when I lie in bed in the morning and see some other cove come along to put them straight, and he loves packing, and I *hate* it, all of which qualities I admire in him hugely but do not attempt to aspire to."

"It was good seeing little John[2] yesterday—he looked so absurd arriving in the car with Dads. He is wearing a Boy Scout's uniform, and his pass has on it, 'Un Boy *Scoot* anglais'! He was very unmoved, but always is, and takes apparently no notice of the war part. He is extraordinarily calm sort of. I mean, most small boys keep on saying (or would), 'Is that a gun?' 'Do shells come here,' etc., but he calmly states as a fact, 'Sounds as if they're shelling Ypres again!' just as if he has been here all his life. To-night I go over there to dinner and to-morrow I think he will come here for the night. I want to get him to myself, for he is so adorable then."

"I don't think I was a very nice small boy, was always rather grown-up, like John. I must have been, but not quite so sardonic and silent! Everybody at the 6th Division loved John, they all miss him terribly. Apparently

[1] On promotion to the Command of a Corps.
[2] His youngest brother, aged 12.—[Ed.]

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he made great friends with each of them, officers and men when nobody else was about; however it is, he has won all their hearts. He, Dads and I went to the 'Fancies'; he was quite as usual—very upset really at having to go next day, but this was only visible to myself, I think. He said little to me, but when I saw him into the car and said 'Good-bye,' he leaned out and said, 'Good-bye, Bildie *darling,*' and somehow those three words from John were sweeter than honey!"

V. Happiness in and out of the War

(*About a visit to the Bishop of London on his engagement*)

"The little note from his Secretary reminds me of an appointment with a doctor. What can he say to us at 10 a.m. . . . I shall bolt on the front doorstep, or don't Bishops have doorsteps? Perhaps it would be best if you went ALONE, after all? We must just go in the right spirit, as you say, but I be d——d if I know what sort of spirit one *does* go in to see a Bishop at 10 a.m. with one's fiancée (horrible word that). I've had no practice. Can you tell me the spirit? . . . Silly we both are, 'cos he'll be just the darling you say he is."

"The place I think is up in the Galtee mountains, great big green and purple fellows with all the lower slopes covered with pine forest and little brown peaty streams come tumbling down, and there are little trout in them that one can catch, and it is very wild, and there is a cottage where one can get milk and eggs. We would take our tent up the stream I love best and put it up where the forest ends and the heather slopes begin, and oh, but we *would* be so happy. . . . We would lie out on the heather on rugs (to keep the little heather bugs away) close to the stream, and the pine trees would whisper and rustle and the old grouse would be calling up the mountains and the timber cutters and haulers would be working *almost* out of sound. . . ."

(*His dachshund dog.*) "My beautiful Gimlet—do you remember him?—oh, I *loved* him so. I shall never

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have another dog like that; one oughtn't to get too fond of any animal. Their lives are so horridly short. I *love* animals. I think I'd sooner see any amount of human beings killed than one animal."

"Ireland is *such* a place for fairies; they really become more human in Ireland for some reason. I know in the Galtee mountains there *must* be fairies, and I know a man, or Celia [1] does, who actually sees the fairies in the Wicklow hills. A heather fairy must be a beloved little person, rather strong and hardy and independent, with very brown skin, and awfully *good* fairies they must be, you know, because the heather is so open and clean."

"Sally the pony was very fresh, and it was happy rushing along with the wind in one's face. Ginger, the other horse I have, has an awful 'crush' on Sally, so much so that he goes quite balmy when he is left in the stable and Sally goes out. To-day the silly ass went worse balmy than usual, and tried to leap out of his stable after her through a hole in the wall. Of *course* he got stuck and took lumps of hair and skin off his legs in a most tiresome way. I wish he wasn't quite so loving!"

"In the room next mine here is an old, old lady who lies all day and night in a big bed. I knew she was in there, but what she was like I had no idea. When ——'s flowers came, though, I summoned up courage and knocked on the door and went in. There she was; she must be nearly a hundred years old, a thin aristocratic old face with white hair, lace cap and transparent hands. So neat she was. I felt very big and clumsy, even though she is but an old lady of the people. I went up to her and put the red roses by her bed, and she smiled so wonderfully and said in a very old voice, 'Ah, les belles fleurs, les belles fleurs,' and then a little polite word of thanks—no surprise or agitation. . . ."

"On the way I had to pass the Convent (Locre), so called in about the lace. La Mère was very nice, and insisted on my going in to have a cup of coffee, so I was ushered into the *huge* kitchen, which of course was spot-

[1] His mother.—[Ed.]

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lessly clean, and we had our coffee together, for I insisted that she should have some too, and I think the old lady was quite glad of the excuse. . . . The lace room is next to the chapel, and service was going on there. It is all in Latin, of course, which I didn't realise before. La Mère told me when I asked, so I said: 'But surely the little children don't understand the prayers then?' and she said, 'Mais ce n'est pas nécessaire. Le bon Dieu, il comprend,' which I thought was a happy idea and a nice one. . . . We then went to the babies' schoolroom; poor little ones, it was as I've told you, *awfully* hot, and the four littlest ones were fast asleep, with their heads on the desk in front of them; one had pulled up her frock on to the desk so as to make it more comfortable for her face. . . . Just as I left all the girls were formed up in twos, and between each two were placed two tiny girls, and in rear all the sisters formed up, and then the parade moved off round the garden, half singing, half saying some chant. I couldn't catch the words, but la Mère told me that each evening at five they did this, and the largest part of the chant was a prayer for the success of the British Army. They all looked so solemn and weird with their black clothes, walking slowly around."

"—— is method personified. His table is a model of neatness; each pin is dressed by the right, the sealing-wax lives next door the gum bottle, and there is the devil to pay when it gets the wrong side, etc., etc. I tease him, of course; I go and borrow all the various things off his table, and they get *buried* on mine under every sort of thing. Old —— goes nearly balmy, but it is very good for him, and it does me much good to hear him swearing. He has a match-box ALWAYS sitting at the north-north-east corner of his table! About once a week I get this box when he is out and fill it up with pins. I don't mean instead of matches, but so that the box can't open —you know—then I put it carefully back. Old —— comes in and wants to light his filthy cigar; he finds the match-box unopenable, and it's lovely; it takes him about half an hour to undo it and put each pin back in its proper nest again. He curses me and calls me a baby! . . ."

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"To-night the road out here would have made a wonderful picture—a very pale dying sun, the rows of trees down each side of the road, tall, bare and sad looking in the greyness, and a lead and pale gold sky. And then the road, the *pavé* blocks shining like silver where the sun caught the liquid mud on them, and along the side of the road the churned-up mud, with the silvery pools of water collected in the holes, all about a drear flat country."

"I had to motor off to the Grenade School, which is some way back from here. I went to see all the various forms of bombs and how they worked, and anything else I could learn about it all. It was a pretty little village not far from Cassel, and the Headquarters are in such a lovely old farm-house, more château than farm-house. A big brick building with old stone carvings over the doors and windows, *grey* bricks they were, and round the house is a moat with fat carp in it—not a very clean moat though! Inside they have rather spoilt the place by turning big rooms into two, and so on. This was done probably some years ago, but it has spoilt the ceilings. There is an old oak stair and a haunted room! During the Revolution the 'aristos' who owned the place were murdered by the mob in a big room there is upstairs—all of them, women and children—and one is now shown the holes in the oak floor made by the axes and swords they did the dirty work with—hence the hauntings. I wish you could have seen the old place with me, with its pear trees around it, and it's oh, so peaceful air—yet there we have set up a school for the most damnable of all modern fighting weapons."

"The cornfields are a mass of poppies and blue cornflowers and the yellow mustard flowers. The poppies looked a little pale after the rain, but the cornflowers and the vulgar loud mustard looked as if nothing could damp them. When one looked into the waving corn it reminded one exactly of those tiny sweets 'hundreds and thousands'—that's just how the flowers look when one stares into the greenness. It was rather lovely, and I rode along with the hot warm scent of the wet earth and of the green things almost pungent, and the squash-squash of

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Sally's little hooves was good and dreamy to listen to."

(*Laughing at impossible situations.*) ". . . I never *can* help it. It was AWFUL once, I remember. I went with Marga to some show—a sort of Eastern play where nobody spoke, you know; well, all went well and I was thrilled at various good murders, and eventually the climax came when the KING found the QUEEN and SOMEONE ELSE in a *huge* bed. The King was cross, of course, and I think pulled out his sword to finish things there and then. Everyone, when the bed scene occurred, sort of looked away, you know, and rather fidgeted, and I gave a great whoop of laughter, and all the old aunts sort of jumped with shock, and Marga nearly cried and pinched me till I could have yelled with pain—and laughter. It made me laugh to see these old aunts watching the jumble of bedclothes that obviously were Queen and somebody else—who—shouldn't—have—been—there!"

vi. HIS THOUGHTS

"Thoughts are such funny things, aren't they? They seethe and tumble for a few seconds, and then clear away, and one sees deep down again like a whirlpool that sometimes boils and then for a few moments becomes more still than the water in a tumbler."

"Oh, if only someone could put England straight again, straight and clean and good. It is so miserable to feel we might be so wonderfully great and aren't; it's all cant and blather and lies. Perhaps something great and good will come out of this war; I feel it may, or I shall someday feel like ——, and love Germans, for they at least are thorough if unpleasant."

"Don't be sad; sorrow is as often a forerunner of calamity as the result of it."

"One sort of *wants* to make trouble to *show* one is miserable, and then having succeeded in making someone

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else thoroughly unhappy one feels too *awful* oneself, doesn't one!"

"If one takes Life like that, not *troubling* to look for sunshine that always is about, it serves one right if one feels bitter and horrid. It (happiness) can I think only be secured by working for it, by overcoming little bothers, by refusing to be unhappy; in fact, by fighting for what is everybody's *right*, i.e. happiness. Sometimes I know I just give in, not perhaps for long, but once one does let the Black Dog of Despair get on one's shoulders, it's mighty hard to shake him off; the only way is to stop him from jumping up there by climbing up and up into better and higher thoughts. Sometimes I can do that, and look down as it were from a big, big height, and see all the little and sometimes big unhappinesses slithering about quite unable to get at me!"

"I would sooner have terrible knocks from running into the ugly things than just exist in peace and uneventfulness in the valley."

"I find men are always more anxious to reveal to another man the worst in them, and the best is kept so close and deep within them."

". . . Certainly the ideal marriage is seldom possible, I think, except with rather 'solid' people, who in some wondrous way do hit it off exactly and seem never to regret it. . . . One has to love enough to drown all self —it's very hard."

"I hate the atmosphere you are now living in, its petty loves and tales and excitements. . . . Don't let yourself get used to these stories of grey loves, don't let your ideal die away because it appears the majority of men and women go so blindly through life. . . . I think I should wish to die if I knew you could hear of grey things and then not feel sorrow and dismay in your heart. . . ."

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vii. To Children

"To the Most Illustrious Field-Marshal Fleabite,[1]
And his sister, General Toadstool.[1]

"Greeting.

"Here are the noses of two German shells that were fired by the most evil Boches at your dearly beloved and so brave father. A few days ago he and I went to a place called Hooge (a very *gruesome* place), and there we fought a great battle, at least your so wonderful father did, I being of but a poor spirit did lie at the bottom of a (wet) trench—it was a very great battle—the Boche being very huge ones and awful fierce, and they did

squirt burning oil at us and fire at us with huge guns and machine guns (that go pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop ever so quick), and there was thick smoke and smells (*E*normous smells) and such a noise that one could hardly hear the squealing of the dying Boches. And then came eight great Boches like this, only *much* worse. Great square hairy Boches, and your father took his great sword and did fall upon them. The first two Boches he cut clean in half (down the middle) like

[1] The names given by him to the two elder children of Major the Earl of Dunmore, V.C., D.S.O.

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this—only I can't draw. This is BLOOD. (You can't see the sword, 'cos it's inside the Boche, and your father is too hard to even *try* and draw) and six Boches were left, but their knees knocked together with fear when they saw the awful happenings that your father did give the two cut down-the-middle-in-half ones—and they put up a poor show. One by one they died (SQUEALING *fearsomely*), and the last one had his head cut clean off, and it came bumpety, bumpety, bump into my trench—it was a very good head, but just a LETTLE too BLUGGY to bring back to you—though your father said he hoped I would do so. So instead I have brought you the German shell noses (which people who think they know a lot about things call 'fuses'). And now good-bye Field-Marshal Fleabite and Admiral (or is it General?) Toadstool, and may all the best things in the world happen to you always, and may your father soon be home again. When he comes you ask him to show you that magic sword of his that cuts Boches to bits just as you might cheese.

"Your most Respectful Admirer
who you don't know now
but perhaps some day will,
"W. CONGREVE."

"MY DEAR TOADSTOOL,

"I think you are the most wonderful artist I ever did see, the picture of yourself makes me more anxious than ever to make your acquaintance, but I think you have made both you and Fleabite look much too good. You mustn't ever be *too* good, you know, or something dreadful will happen to you—it always does to people who are too good. You want to be sort of half and half, for then mummies never know what to expect, and are awful pleased when one *is* good. She will say these are very wrong sort of morals for you, but I don't expect you know such a beastly word as morals, and don't try to find out. I loved your letter, and think it's very sweet of you to write to me. You must *never* bother to answer any letter of mine, and we will both be like that, you see. Suddenly one day you may feel 'I think I will write to Billy,' *then* write, for it's the right time to write then,

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but when you feel 'Oh, *bother,* I've never answered that letter of his,' then *don't* write, for it's the wrong time, and friends like you and I only write when they feel they want to—see?

"I haven't seen your Daddy for ages and ages, for I live now in a horrid old broken farm-house close up to the trenches, and never get a chance to get back to see anybody, and your Daddy is too busy to come and see me—so there we are—but I expect we shall meet again some day all right.

"I *hope* to come home about the end of September, but it's always doubtful when one can get away. When I do come, Toadstool, will you and Fleabite promise to come with me to a play and a HUGE tea? Where shall we go to? Let's plan, for that's happy, and makes one feel as if it's really happening. Do you like funny things or serious things? I like funny things best, I think, for I love laughing till I ache all over. I hope you laugh well! I expect you do. You decide what we are to go to, and let me know.

"The old Boches are very tired of the War, I think. I am sure they are not getting enough to eat, and nobody feels really happy when they are not getting enough to eat, you know. So your Daddy and I and all of us will soon be coming home again, and then, like the Princess in the fairy story, we will live happily ever afterwards.

"Do you like fairy stories? I do. I am going to write a book of them some day—not about Princesses, 'cos I think fairies must be bored of Princesses by now, but about just ordinary people who know what fairies mean. You *must* love fairies, that's awfully important, you know, almost as important as not being too good.

"Well, my dear, I must do some silly stuff called work, and say good-bye to you. My love to your Mummie and Fleabite, and much to yourself.

"Yours,
"BILLY."

viii. HIS FAITH

"To my mind to serve God is not to be done by avoiding temptations, by locking oneself up; serve Him by helping others to serve Him."

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". . . A real tangible friendship with God, and Love —it's beautiful, isn't it?—once one knows one can never forget it, but sometimes it seems to leave one for a while, I suppose when one is so-called happy and untroubled; one ought to be able to have this feeling so close to one always that bad thoughts could never get in. When I feel I have the real Love in my hands, as it were, I feel then that never again *could* I possibly fall from that high estate, and yet the grip on Love—God's love—goes from one when one's thoughts are distracted, and then suddenly up comes the temptation, and where is one? One is like the man who carried the revolver every day of his life except on the day he met the robber—he had then left his revolver at home. I so often leave my revolver at home . . . I suppose I shall often fail, and yet I know that the quality of the love I am given by God won't change; it's *all* there, could only one take it—and keep it."

(*To his Mother.*) "The spring in the country is so wonderful, isn't it? Here there is no country left, it is all mud and khaki, yet some days ago there was a hot spring sun, and up close behind the trenches in a ruined farm, hopelessly and filthily ruined, I found a clump of the most innocent yellow daffs you can imagine—*very* happy it was—next day a shell killed them. . . . I am glad I am a hero to you, little Cis, but the Army is now very huge, and I am very very little, my dear, truly I am, and the nice things you have heard are all those who love Dads or you have chosen to say, so take it all *cum grano salis*, and remember my littleness. Some day I may grow big—I think perhaps I shall, for it's just too *wonderful* how God seems to help and help and always help me—it's so vividly real, this help, that it almost startles me. Do you know the feeling? In everything He helps, and now I believe that there is nothing too great for Him to do for one. Are you glad I feel like that? You *must* be, for it's so wonderful."

"It *is* just the start to things higher that we all need to make it almost impossible for us to drop back again to the bog, and that start *does* seem to come only to *individuals* in the guise of a great sorrow. Can a nation

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be so chastened by sorrow that it will all look up? I don't know what to think when you say 'perhaps the souls of all people in the world *are* God.' It's very big, that thought; if it is so, then it would seem to me to make it more difficult for one individual to lift up a crowd or a nation to higher thoughts!"

"I'll tell you how prayer strikes me . . . it's quite obvious that God knows all you want, He knows all everyone wants, He knows everything. Why then pray? I feel it is because one has to *help* oneself to God, and the only way is by prayer and by living straight and true, as one prays. I mean, one might pray every night like a little child, 'Please make me a good boy'—that's all right, but one has to help oneself and make oneself, and the prayers give one *strength* to help oneself. . . . This praying to God for things He knows does not seem to me to be absurd, as it is in those moments of prayer that one draws so close to God and gathers strength somehow from Him. . . . I feel that the power of simple trusting prayer is very, very great—good thoughts bring good—evil thoughts evil—the tremendous trust we have in God and the certainty of His Presence make our prayers a real thing—something that takes good to the place one wants it to go to. . . ."

". . . . Though I am afraid my habitation is not in the shadow of the Almighty, I should like it to be, and He knows it, so don't fear for me. . . ."

". . . The thoughts I have are the thoughts of the ordinary unintelligent type, worldly and selfish, and yet mixed with these is the conviction that in some way I have got above reaching the peace of understanding."

"I *do* love God, I do so want to keep close to Him, to be a little worthy of Him and His love—it's the way to true happiness."

"I *couldn't* ever have a swelled head, because I know it's not *me* at all who does well. I remember in that little book [1] Uncle George [2] gave me, and which I always carry,

[1] *The Practice of the Presence of God.*

[2] Father Congreve—a Cowley Father, Billy's great-uncle. [Ed.]

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came the words, 'I cannot do this unless Thou enablest me,' and often and often have I said those words to God, knowing their truth, and knowing too that His help *would* come—and it ALWAYS has. So one could never feel *proud* of whatever one did, could one? and there is only the feeling in one of greater and greater joy as each time one feels more secure in God's love."

"When Godders died and my life looked all grey, a greater light came into my heart than ever had been before, and it has all left me *closer* to good. I feel so strongly that only by sorrow can we reach heights; it's a grim idea, yet see how it works, time after time; the passing of a little sorrow or trouble if you face it and fight it with truth leaves you closer to perfection, to God, and these great sorrows that seem to shake the very foundations of your love of life, surely they must work great good and wonder in your soul and life, and if you face them bravely and with truth."

"Nothing I do or could do wrong could now be passed by me as being but a little thing, for I know it's the little things that count, and I feel sometimes almost as the knights of old must have felt when they stood up in their stirrups and with some great sword in their hand shouted out, 'For God and my lady!'"

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